The economy magazine for ZX Spectrum enthusiasts

BREAK SPACE

Issue 2

Never saw the Summer sun

38 Games reviewed! 38!

Including :

Gorf

Driar

Hair Trigger

DiaTanX

Enjoy a Summer Break with
Frogger RX

Willy! Wordsworth!
2 Exclusive Type-Ins!

Brand new New POKEs section!
Tabletop action with Morkin!

YOUR letters!
Chapell Roan reviews Gorf!

All the best from the ZX Spectrum in 2025
And the links work this time!

Editorial

Hey.
We're back!
Who would have thought it?

When we started work on Issue 1 of Break Space, we had no idea if anyone else would be interested. In truth, I wasn't sure if *we'd* still be interested by the end of it.

We also had no idea how many people would even download the first issue. Dozens? Hundreds? Thousands, it turns out.
On behalf of the team : Thanks to each and every one of you.

So - you're interested. We're interested. And the Spectrum scene remains interesting, with dozens more releases this quarter keeping us busy.

We've had a couple of personnel changes during the quarter - Al has decided to step away to focus on his own blog over at https://zxspectrumitlives.wixsite.com/home/ We wish him continued success there, and fear not - he managed to submit some cracking reviews for us before departing. Thanks Al, you'll be missed. We'll always have Dodge City.

Joining the Review Crew is Shaun Bebbington, an actual professional writer with credits from Retro Gamer amongst others. He'll also have worked with actual professional editors before, which makes me very nervous.

We've also added features : POKEs from ANDREW RYALS, a Jet Set Willy mod deep-dive, some ruminations on Speccy-related media and a couple of cool BASIC type-ins.

Finally, as you'll have seen already, we have an actual proper artist for the cover this time. Nick from Keezees.com has delivered a spectacular Summery scene for the front page. Original cover art was a huge part of the magazine scene in the 80s, so I'm thrilled that Break Space can now stand proudly side-by-side with the ancestors.

It's been a lot of hard work for the whole team, getting Issue 2 together, but all of it enjoyable and worth every minute. Hopefully you enjoy the issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.
And if anyone out there fancies joining the fun for Issue 3, check out the box below.

Until next time,
Mpk

Are you passionate about ZX Spectrum games? Not like that, ew.

Are you literate, funny, and/or piercingly intelligent?

Do you think that playing about 15 Speccy games over 3 months and then writing reviews of them is a good idea?

Are you comfortable with never, ever getting paid for doing so?

In that case, maybe you should send us a writing sample : Review one of the games listed on the back page under 'Next Time' in about 400 words and send it to
BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com

We're waiting to hear from you.

Ye Olde Review Crew

All singing, all dancing, our Sensational Six Break Space reviewers are the height of glamour and sophistication. Let's get to know them, maybe play a game of Marry/Divorce/Kill.

The hardest working man in showbusiness, Dave's been especially busy this issue, immersing himself in the wacky world of Jet Set Willy clones. He's taken to leaping around the office, stealing up to 6 items from every room, and sometimes has trouble walking past the stairs.

Favourite Monarch : Richard III, for his disregard for Leicester parking regulations.

Prodigal son **Andy** disappeared for about 10 weeks of our 12-week cycle, only popping up at the end to drop some killer reviews and a massive article about Morkin. And there was much rejoicing, although the fatted calf's been on the phone to his agent a lot.

Favourite Monarch : Sweyn Forkbeard, who was King of England for five whole weeks in 1013/1014.

Not just a pretty face, **Jamie** wrote Rush, which we've reviewed this issue. He was quick to volunteer to review it as well, but Mpk displayed keen editorial instincts by nixing that idea. He also wrote a QL game. Lol.

Favourite Monarch : The King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley. You can see the likeness, in fairness.

The award-winning **Sloany** gave a lengthy interview to rival publication FREEZE-ZX . Who's side is he on? Blimmin' turncoat.

Favourite Monarch : The King of all Cosmos, because he's on a roll! Sloany now owes us a 48k Katamari game

The office memo said that **AL** had 'gone to live on a farm' in an attempt to intimidate the other reviewers, but he keeps updating his blog, which rather undermines that subtext.

Favourite Monarch : We're just going to assume that it's Tyranasaurus Rex.

Shaun just showed up one day, tapping on the office window like Danny Glick. We let him in, and he hasn't bitten anyone yet. Win/Win.

Favourite Monarch : Elizabeth II. Both big Paddington fans, I reckon.

And then there's **Mpk**, the psychotic despot monarch of this whole situation. Only gout and scurvy can stop him.

Favourite Monarch : Danaus plexippus. The big stripey legend.

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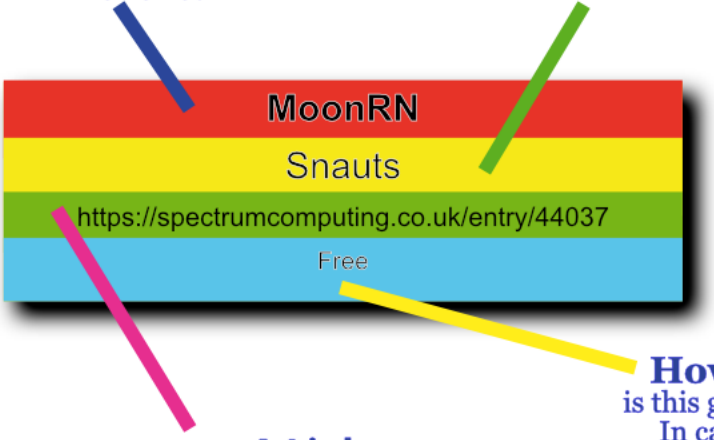
Review Header Explained

So, we have this colourful box at the top of every review. Just in case there's any confusion, here's what it all means.



The name of the game being reviewed

Publisher / Author The folks wot dunnit

A Link to the game's entry on SpectrumComputing.co.uk
You'll find lots of data there, all sourced from the mighty ZXDB.
Sometimes the games are available to download directly from SC, but generally there will be a link to itch.io or whereever under the 'Related Links' section.

How Much is this going to cost? In cases where there's a suggested but not compulsory Pay What You Want option, we list it as PWYW / £suggested

Review Policy

We cover each game on its own merits, and look for the positives. The majority of the games here are hobby projects. It would not be fair or useful to review such projects harshly.

Each game will be reviewed by at least 2 reviewers, and given a fair assessment in its own context.

We don't award scores, but we do grant the coveted Break Space ACE award to the most deserving titles. Throughout all of history, only 7 games have attained this honour. Can more make the mark this issue? (Yes)

Break Space Ace

We have 2 arcade conversions vying for Aces this month in Frogger and Gorf, which has raised a question amongst the team. Is a perfect conversion enough, if the base game has aged? We agreed that no, it isn't, which lead to some disagreement whether these two were good enough designs to get the award. Which side won out? Read on, Adventurer. Your answer awaits.

The Haps

A 'News' section in a quarterly magazine seems absurd, but we've done it anyway.

Next v3 Kickstarter underway

If you've managed to make it this far without splashing the cash on a Spectrum Next, look out! The 3rd iteration of the crowd-funding campaign is underway from July 19th.

No official word on the price yet, of course, but it was £300 last time, so assume something similar this time. There was a limited early bird offer on the previous campaign, so get yourself online at 8am on Saturday to maybe save yourself 20 quid.

This time it's likely to feature a licensed C64 core, if you fancy a bit of that, and don't forget that the QL core is already out for v1 and v2 owners! And Jamie published a game for the QL recently, the madman, so you'll have something to play on it.

Crash Live : Book Now

CRASH
LIVE!
2025

Crash Live 4 is confirmed for the weekend of 15/16 November in Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

If you want to hang out, play Spectrum and Arcade games and natter with Specchums about all things Sinclair, this is your chance. There will be of course be events throughout the weekend and you can bask in the presence of luminaries such as Malcolm 'Trashman' Evans and Sandy White, the latter presumably riding about on a giant ant.

Tickets are going fast from https://fusionretrobooks.com/pages/crashevent2025

Thespians Tackle Techie's Tantrum

Together in Electric Dreams, a stage play about a fateful dinner date between Sir Clive Sinclair and Alan Sugar, is back for a final run in the UK this summer.

There will be shows in Preston, Leigh, Liverpool, Manchester, Huddersfield, Oldham and London

Tickets available from : https://www.fatsoma.com/p/room-5064-productions except the Leigh show which you can book from Here

ESP32 Rainbow

Spectrum 0.1
Basic
Games

The ESP what now? This is a singleboard Speccy with a built in screen, emulating the 48k and 128k Spectrums. It's a fascinating project, which should ship at the end of July, costing $99.

https://www.crowdsupply.com/atomic14/esp32-rainbow

FREEZE-ZX off to the printers

Brand new ZX Spectrum magazine FREEZE-ZX is shipping in early August.

From the creator of much loved C64 title FREEZE 64, this looks like a hoot. Feature packed, too, including an extensive profile of our very own, award-winning, Sloany.

There's still time to reserve your copy at https://freeze64.com/freezezx-issue-1/ if you're quick.

FREEZE-ZX
A PREMIER GAMING ZINE FOR ZX SPECTRUM ENTHUSIASTS
MICKEY AND MINNIE IN Jet Set STEAMBOAT WILLIE!
48K / 128K SPECTRUM
WE'RE TAKING THE MICKEY!
We take a gentle steamboat trip down the river and discover the story behind the development of Dave Sloan's fabulous 2024 platformer.
PLUS: SINCLAIR SIN-BIN | RALLY BUG | PIROMANIA
GAMES WE TYPED IN | MAP ATTACK | SECRET SQUIRREL
REVIEWS | POKES CORNER | WHAT NEXT? + LOTS MORE!
FREEZE-ZX ISSUE #01 MICKEY

Tiny Sinclair handheld

An odd one this : Sir Clive's nephew Grant Sinclair has unveiled a slimline handheld called the GamerCard. It's got weird buttons, it's got a Raspberry Pi inside and at 6.5mm it's thinner than Kate Moss' excuses. The official BreakSpace line is that it looks cool, but it's not clear if any of the staff actually agree. Oh well.

https://www.grantsinclair.com/gamercard

GAMERCARD
ASTRO BLAZE
PICO-8
MANUAL

Hyper Sentinel Fusion

Certaintly sounds like a video game, doesn't it?
Andrew and Rob Hewson (yes, of Hewson Consultants fame) have launched a new Kickstarter campaign for this high-speed 'Paradroid+Uridium+Hades' rogue-like PC shooter.

Predecessor Hyper Sentinel was a blast. Go back this one at https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/robhwson/hyper-sentinel-fusion/

Donkey Kong Never Sleeps

Artonapilos' 2024 hit Donkey Kong won every breathless plaudit you can imagine in 2024, including topping the SC GOTY polls. So, naturally, Art has been working tirelessly to make it better. He's added a host of improvements and fixes since last year, and there's even a SAM Coupe version under development.

It's a stellar conversion for the Speccy, and you can check out the latest version at the ZX-Art page here : https://zxart.ee/eng/software/games/arcade/platform/classic-platformers/donkey-kong2/

BONUS 5600
L=06
1UP 040800
HIGH SCORE 040800

DONKEY KONG
ORIGINAL ARCADE GAME BY NINTENDO 1981
SPECTRUM VERSION BY LUKAS RACHUNEK 2024
ARTONAPILOS

Manic Mailers

Got any comments on the magazine? Feel like your favourite game was robbed of an Ace? Spotted a typo? Got thoughts about MPAGD? Need relationship advice? Drop us a line at BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com

We got a while bunch of feedback from email, itch.io, SC forums and beyond. Mostly positive, I'm relieved to say, but naturally we didn't get everything correct.

Here's some highlights.

Prime Mover

As an 11 year old first seeing a rubber key Sinclair Spectrum in the early 1980s, it forged my love of programming to being a software developer today - not games though...
I really like your first edition, but since I started reading the "Program Pitstop" code listings in Your Sinclair and Sinclair User about 40 years ago, I was disappointed to see them missing from your new magazine. :(
But in all seriousness - great work!
Mark Reynolds

Mark - thanks for the kind words, and know that yours was the very first email we got to our feedback address! Whatever else happens, they can never take that from you.

Also, we've heard your call and are expanding our technical nouse - hopefully Snorkers' listings can start to fill that gap. And you're not developing games… yet! Maybe you can take some inspiration from the reviews this month.

Stay a while. Stay… forever

Hey there!
I've just finished reading the first issue of Break Space, and wanted to say that I absolutely adore it.
As a relative newcomer to anything Speccy-related, I'm still wrapping my head around the plethora of games both old and new, and will definitely be using your magazine as a guide to modern releases.
I'm really looking forward to the next issue!
Grace Evans

Thanks Grace! Welcome to the fold.

We note that you've been working hard on some demos over at http://system6302.itch.io - we're keeping a close eye on how these develop. Hopefully we get to review a full game from you soon.

Sponsored by Specsavers?

I've been reading through some of the reviews; fantastic job, guys (including the wacky humour) !
If you'll allow me just one small suggestion:

While I understand the benefits of reducing the filesize, I do believe that at a whopping 60 pages (or 30 double pages) filled with colourful imagery, you could afford a bit higher quality/resolution in the published PDF. I'm sure that 40-50MB instead of the current 17MB wouldn't break anyone's storage in current systems, and there might be a significant improvement in visual quality, especially in larger screens.

Ta! (<-- yes, I actually just wrote that!)
Survivisected on itch.io

You could not be more correct. This Issue is in a much higher image quality and larger file, but we're not storing things on tapes or floppy disks anymore, so I reckon that's fine. Hopefully the image quality is easier on the eye than before.

ZXGM - The Shape of Things to Come? (wherein the ZXGM toolset dev addresses some notes we made about the engine in Issue 1)

Great work! Thank you so much for this fantastic first issue. If you need any information about ZX Spectrum Game Maker, feel free to contact me.

I'm making a note to improve the engine and allow for an alternative physics system without having to write code. The engine is completely open source, so all its features can be fully modified, including the physics. But it's always better if the designer can do it without having to write code.

Currently, the engine supports 3 types of games: side platforms, arcade platforms (screen-to-screen), and top-down games.

Finally, thank you so much, firstly, for creating this fantastic magazine with all its content, and secondly, for speaking so highly of ZX Spectrum Game Maker and, most importantly, the games created with it or any other engine or language. I love this issue!

Thank you so much again and I am waiting for the next number!
Juntelart on Itch.io

ZXGM is a fantastic achievement, and has done a great job of opening up action game development to non-coders. We see plenty of great-looking games as a result, but there's a particular 'feel' to the gameplay that can be overly familiar. Alterations to the physics, as in Operation Moo from this month, make a huge difference to the gameplay and make games feel fresh. Easily modifiable physics would be great for everyone. We're looking forward to a wider variety of games to come.

Squinting at the Glossary

I just had a quick look on the magazine, it has lots of colour and lots of text!
Sometimes the text colours is a bit too monochrome and the background way too busy, but then again I have lots of time to read it. The glossary for example, is too much of a wall of text.

The background on page 2 is a bit too colourful and I find my old eyes can't concentrate on the text.

I notice there are a lot of recent games in there, so this might give me more priorities to choose which games to play.
Are these all recent games?
Timmy on the SpectrumComputing forums

You're not wrong about the colours. The B3ta newsletter gave us a shout-out and delightedly reported that
"the colour scheme alone is an affront to the eyes, as it should be**",**
which I can't argue with. But I like all the colours! I've tried to tone down a little bit this time, but may get carried away at times.

The issue 1 glossary was hard to read, I agree. The Spectrum font is not conducive to large blocks of text. I've switched it up this time, although retained the royal purple.

And yes, the games are all new this year. In some cases they may be older games that have been rediscovered, or translated, or wherever, but they are all 'released' in some way this year. The driving idea behind the whole endeavour is to give all the new games their moment in the sun.

The Weakest Link?

In my lazy bürostuhl I had the impressive idea to make those links (hidden) in the top of the article a working link?
C.Born on the SpectrumComputing forums

(Hidden)!? How dare you suggest that the text of the link was getting lost in the colourful curves of the review headers! You may have a point though, like Timmy above. The review headers are now more readable, and clickable, as are other links in the magazine. Last time, I'd somehow concluded that it was a tricky technical challenge to get links working, but it turns out it's literally the easiest thing I've ever done. So, sorry about that.

Message from the Past

Hello Mpk,
Thank you to you, Dave, Andy, Jamie, Sloany and AL (the real 5 Star) for putting together BreakSpace and sharing with the Speccy community, it is truely awesome. Cheers!
Pierre from comp.sys.sinclair

Feedback from Usenet! USENET! In 2025! Edge could never.
Thanks Pierre! Glad you enjoyed it. Keep on rocking the NNTP, baby.

Frogger RX

Midnight Brew / Highrise feat. Lee Bee

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44207

$5

There are few arcade games as iconic as Frogger—Konami's 1981 masterpiece that tasked players with guiding a determined amphibian across treacherous roads and deadly rivers. For decades, Spectrum owners had to make do with compromised conversions, but now, Highrise Games (the studio behind stellar ports like Scramble and Pacman) has delivered what might be the closest thing to an arcade-perfect Frogger the ZX Spectrum has ever seen.

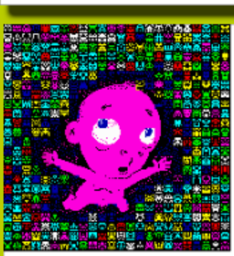
Highrise has pulled off something very impressive visually. Due to the size of the Spectrum screen and the number of pixels available, fitting the full arcade experience on a single screen is more challenging that it looks. But somehow, all the game's signature visuals—the busy highway, the flowing river, and the vibrant lily pads—are all faithfully recreated with impressive accuracy. The cars, trucks, and logs animate smoothly, and the frog itself is instantly recognizable, complete with its signature hopping animation. I love the careful arrangement of graphics to display the Frogger logo in green, yellow and purple. It exists within the constraints of the spectrums limited graphics while remaining true to the arcade version of the game – quite a feat indeed.

The most crucial element of any Frogger port is the controls—if the frog doesn't move with the right weight and responsiveness, the game falls flat. Thankfully, Highrise nails it. Movement is grid-based, just like the arcade, meaning each press of the joystick or keyboard moves Frogger exactly one space. The timing required to dodge traffic and leap onto moving logs feels authentic. Input is responsive and movement is polished and fluid.

The arcade's scoring system also seems to be faithfully recreated, including the game's time mechanic—where faster completion delivers bigger bonuses. This means you can play for score, a feature that adds important depth and re-playability to what could be a simple single screen game.

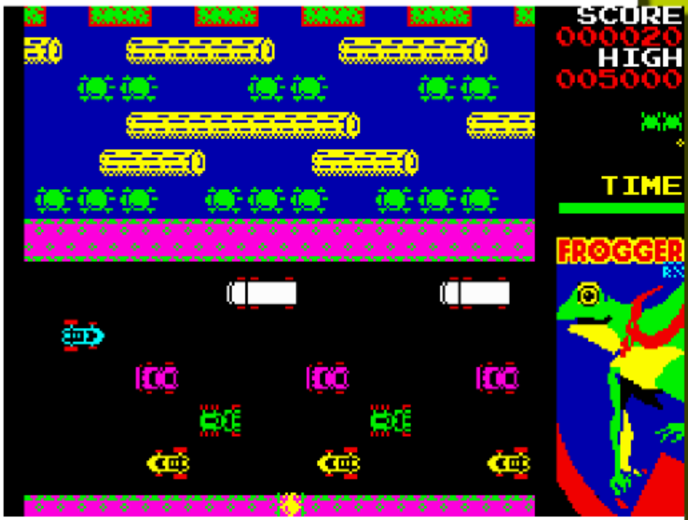
Hats off to Highrise for what has been achieved musically. Again, slavish adherence to arcade perfection is on full display. This game is a real treat on the ears. He has squeezed out a remarkably accurate rendition of the arcade's soundtrack, from the hopping sound effect, to the tense, fast-paced music that kicks in when time is running low. If feels like every aspect of the arcade original sound has been recreated here. It's an element of this game that really shines, so make sure you play with AY enabled : it's so, so worth it.

I took some time to watch a video of the original Arcade, and felt spooked by how close this version really is. From sound, the graphics, to gameplay – this has it all. Highrise has done something quite wonderful —this isn't just another Frogger clone, but a painstakingly crafted love letter to the arcade classic. It's fast, challenging, and most importantly, fun. This is the version to play on the Spectrum - near-arcade perfection.



While researching this review, I played the nearly fifty ZX Frogger clones made before 2025, and the experience was so bad that I decided to self immolate. The only reason I'm still here, is that as a consummate professional I felt duty bound to write this review first. So as I type, still dripping with paraffin, I can say that this game makes up for the preceding abominations, and has dragged me back to sanity, and away from that smouldering cigarette.

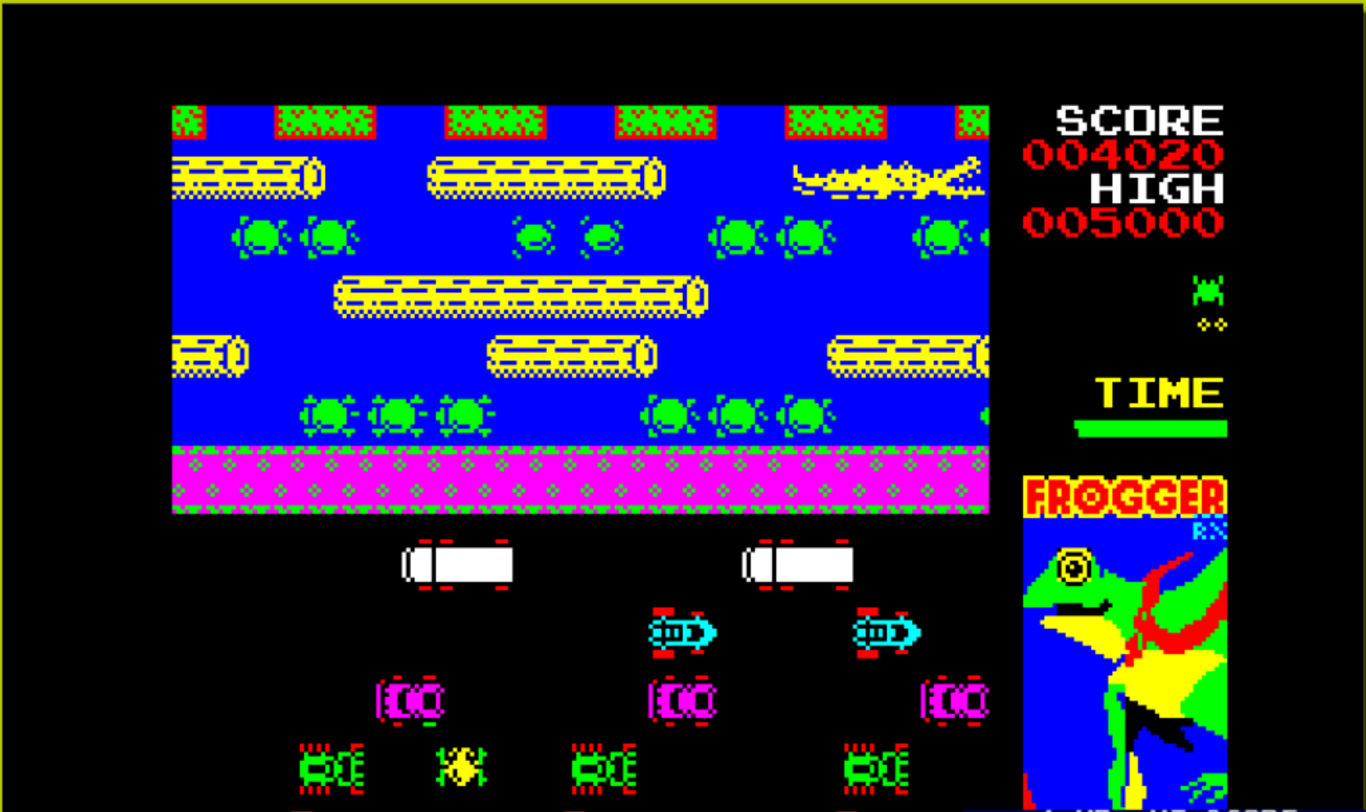
It's deceptively hard to make a Frogger game, a good one even more so. It may just be a one-screener, but there's a lot of sprites to draw & delete, and a lot of pixels to push. Highrise has achieved it with shrewd design decisions and some magic going on under the hood.

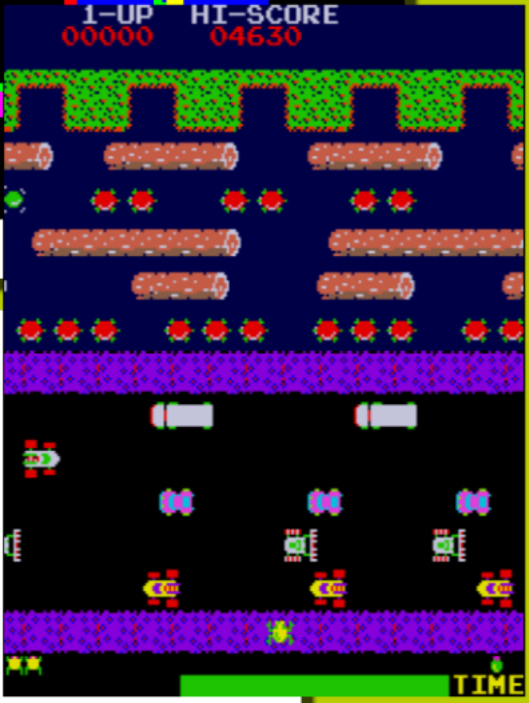


What are those green vehicles? Tractors?

Not only does it look and play great, it sounds it too. Musician Lee Bee has an understated capability to be creative, but also do a sterling workman-like job when required. The numerous Frogger ditties required the latter, and they are so well realised that I grin like a lobotomy patient every time I hear them.

This is quite simply a perfect ZX-Spectrum Frogger. It's even got a perfect amount of colour clash.





Spot the difference

The first time I saw Frogger in the arcade, I watched an older kid play it - jumping on logs to get home safely. When it was my turn, 10p slotted confidently into place, I stretched up on my toes and mimicked his winning strategy - deftly jumping onto the roof of a passing car to make it across the road. This didn't work, and everyone laughed at me. Since that moment, I have always hated Frogger.

Unfairly, of course - this was a megahit in the arcade for a reason - but any conversion has its work cut out to win me over. It doesn't help that any other Frogger clone I played during the Spectrum's heyday was more-or-less garbage. Yomp, anyone? Horace Goes Skiing? No, thank you.

But Highrise arrives hot off his fantastic Scramble RX in 2024, always expected to deliver a winner. And, naturally, this Frogger aces all the tests. Smooth, fluid, accurate - no-one's even attempted a version this good before. The stretchy-legged animation from the arcade is here, as are the insects, lady frogs, sinking turtles and all the rest. The 128k version is pleasingly loud, with a wide selection of tunes providing a proper arcade din. The game itself is perhaps not as deep as, say, Pacman, but instantly playable here with responsive controls in both game and menus.

So, it turns out, I've been a fool. It's taken this this immaculate conversion to lift the scales from my eyes.

I forgive you, Frogger. You're alright.

FROGGER
RX
MIDNIGHT BREW
SEGA/Gremlin
Lee Bee AUDIO

What's in that briefcase? Nuclear Launch codes, I reckon.

Footbal Manager

Softimar

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44099

Free

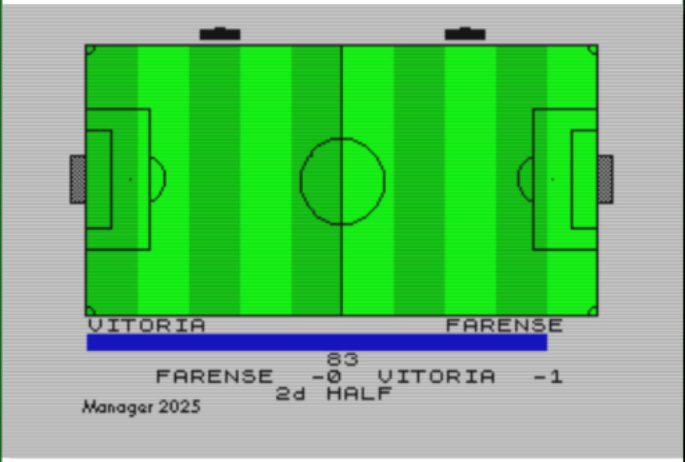
Mpk‘s Review

Footbal Manager (note the single ‘l’) is a Portugese title from 1989, given a fresh lick of paint, a translation and a re-release in 2025. It is, of course, a clone of Football Manager, centered on the Portugese League. You select your club, pick the team, buy and sell players, and hopefully watch your lads go on to win the league.

We’ve played 3, Drawn 3. 7 goals scored, 7 conceded. Not a great start to my managerial career, but I’m at a loss for what to do. I don’t have good options on the bench, so I have very little leeway to make changes. Up until now, the transfer market has been static as well, but now, activity. I have 2 offers in for players : Kaka, a bench-warming defender in decline, is shipped off for 30 mill, and I snap up a hot young midfielder by the name of Gaitan for 45.

The transfer market deals arrive in pairs - you get 2 offers to sell, but can only pick 1. And you get 2 players to buy, and can only pick one of those. This forces you to make potentially interesting choices. But you need to be careful - the game will allow you to buy a player you can’t afford, at which point your game is over.

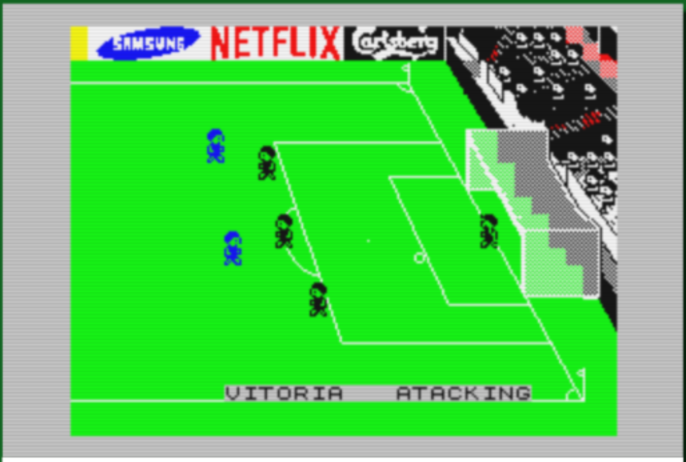
Gaitan installed in midfield, we move to game 4. Another draw, 1-1 this time, but my goalkeeper picks up an injury : out for 3 games. I switch in the reserve, and replace a midfielder with a defender to protect the youngster a bit.



Grimly hanging onto a one-goal lead

I didn’t get any notification that my goalie was injured - you have to check your roster after every game just in case. With game 5 coming up, it would be nice to see what my opponents are like, but that doesn’t seem to be available. I can see their last result, and the league table, but not where their strengths are.

But maybe I needn’t have worried - we take an early lead, defender Dinis rifling in from a free kick just outside the box. We’re under pressure though, our opponents getting a series of chances, repeatedly making our young keeper earn his crust. This is where I’d maybe take off an attacker and beef up the midfield again to regain control - but I can’t. No substitutes available during the match. We hold on though for 75 tense minutes - victory at last!



Foot like a traction engine!

And so it goes. The presentation is lovely, with a nice menu system and match highlights that are a big step up from Kevin Toms’ stickmen. There’s a classy tune at the start, too.

There is perhaps too little to do though, not quite enough control, and games of this nature are always going to struggle with protracted waits as data is calculated.

But FM games get their strength from being little story generators, and if you can just get yourself invested in your little team of stars, there’s some entertainment to be had from orchestrating your own little football soap opera.

Sloany’s Comment

By the tidy beard of Sir Kevin of Toms! It's a brand new football management game for 2025, something the mighty Sega couldn't manage.

I used to play footie management sims a LOT back in the day, and they tend to land somewhere on a spectrum (!) where at one end lie games that are straightforward but with limited controls, and the other lie titles that are extremely sophisticated but utterly overwhelming.

This one falls into the former camp. Playing it evokes happy memories of Kevin Toms' classic but comes with the exotic prospect of managing in the league of our Portuguese friends. It also has more realistic stickmen performing the animated highlights.

It can plod along at times but a top tip for Next users is to run it on 28MHz, which gets things ticking along nicely.

Back of the net!

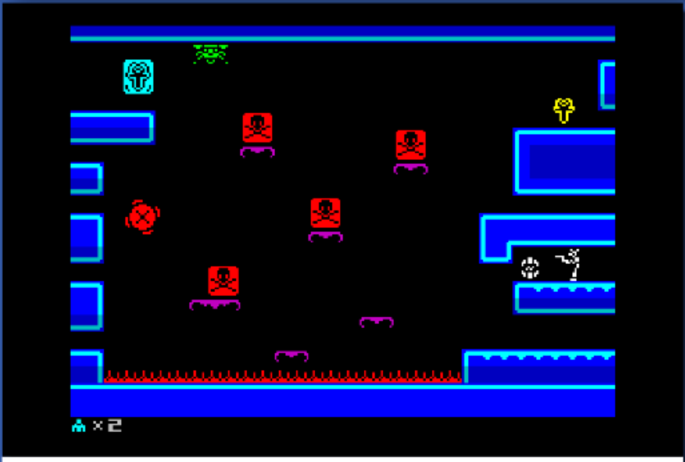
Not quite a brand new game, this was written in 1989 by a 13-year-old Tiago Martins & revamped by his cousin Mário Armão Ferreira, all these years later, inspired by the release of the The Spectrum.

Ziona Quest 2

IAMAI Creation

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44215

PWYW / $2



Shoot the green thing to destroy the skull things, then get the yellow thing to open the blue thing

Al's Review

It seems like only the other day that I played the original Ziona Quest and reviewed it on my own blog site ZX SPECTRUM-IT LIVES!!! I remember being grateful that it began with a Z as I was doing an A to Z feature and was struggling to find a Z. I didn't want to play Zoids, and who could blame me?

The first ZQ was a cunning little one-screen-at-a-time number. It was quirky, fun and quite original in a way that so many things aren't. And the plot was batspit crazy. Throw a rock at a TV 3 times, take 3 TV cores to the temple, gain truth bombs to throw at humans, guide them to the temple, kill the needlers with golden rocks, shoot arrows at your escaping brother, turn him gold, get a special golden rock, then the temple flashes and onto the next level. Sooooo predictable...

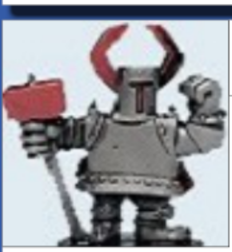
But now here's ZQ2. Apparently your previously brainwashed sibling has unearthed a plot involving injecting humans with digital receptors, which when activated will transform people into mindless drones. Someone has to infiltrate a facility to find the tech behind such skullduggery and destroy it. That'll be you then. None of this resembles anything that's happened recently in real life, does it?

You're armed with a gun, so that's nice, and you can even shoot diagonally like you're that RoboCop dude. The action takes place over a number of screens this time, the innards of the Mortech facility. Robots patrol the place and some rabid humans too. So you must shoot 'em or just avoid 'em, but either way you must maintain your progress through the building or else the evil guys will really win and brainwash us all. Erm, the people in the game, that is. Not us.

ZQ2 moves nicely along. Great music, nicely animated sprites and some neat moves, like reflecting bullets by doing cool knee slides. I made some decent progress in it, though I'm not too sure just how far through I've got, but it seems fairly far through the first part. Sadly I've not been able to witness the lower realms labyrinth, find the key and destroy the evil machine, then escape. Shame really.

The only downside is the difficulty level. I'm the kinda guy who saves his game state regularly, or else I'd never get anywhere in any game. But there comes a point when it's so bloomin' hard, your progress becomes painfully slow and frustrating. It feels like it just needs tweaking downwards a bit to enhance playability.

Otherwise though, it's quite a slick little number, and props to the author for not imposing a price on it.



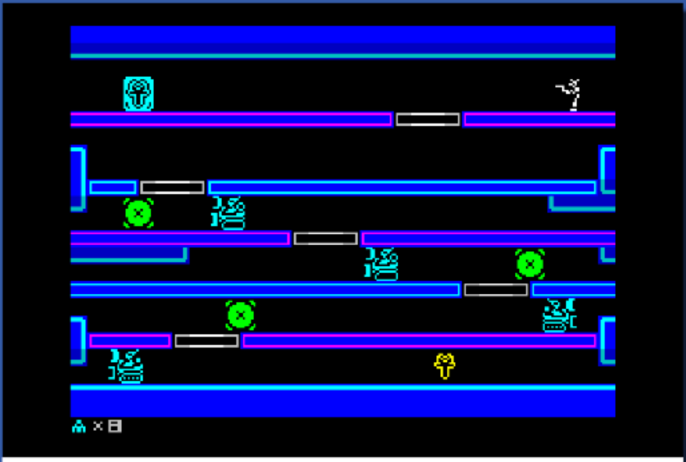
Mpk's Comment

Ziona Quest was, as detailed by Al, absolutely bonkers. It was also difficult, with a lot happening on a single densely populated screen. ZQ2 is a ghost town by comparison, with sparse, largely empty screens that feel like you're exploring an abandoned complex. Which is not to say that it's any less difficult; while there's not so many things in your way, they're all trying to kill you as soon as possible.

Like the first game, there are a lot of neat ideas and touches - the aiming feature to trigger robots high above you is clever, and the running slide is top class fun, if tricky to get the hang of. I think I'd have liked a redefine keys option - Q here aims up, while W jumps, and it's fatally easy to get them mixed up in the heat of the moment, and given that you're often just a moment from death, that's a problem.

The other notable thing about the first game was the spectacular funky music - there's a more dramatic tune this time around, but it's also very pleasant and doesn't get too repetitive.

A sequel, then, that changes everything, takes risks and is all the better for it. It's just maybe too challenging for little old me. I wanted to enjoy it more, but kept hitting roadblocks of difficulty that made it more frustrating than fun. Skill issue, I guess.



Answers on a postcard please if anyone can do this screen

ZX Ordle

Alex K

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44257

Free

Sloany’s Review

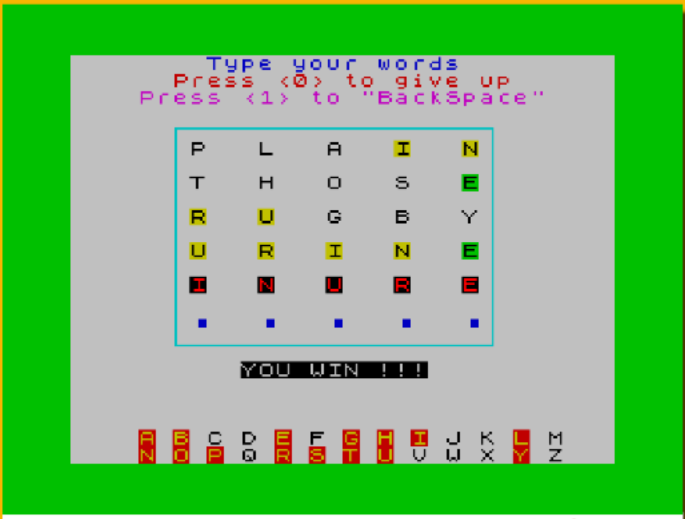
“Words, don't come easy to me.” So sang one hit wonder FR David in his 1982 classic. Well he'd be crap at this then, as it's all about knowing words.

Ah yes. Wordle. That 2021 phenomenon that completely passed me by at the time. I did get into it a couple of years later when everyone else was sick of it - well, it's retro, innit! I'll even pass on my super-duper failsafe Wordle tip for the good people of Break Space (see box-out).

Written in BASIC, ZX Ordle brings the popular word game to the Speccy, with a few tweaks to the well established rules. Why play Wordle on your Speccy, and why this particular version? Well as Vincent Vega says about Europe in Pulp Fiction, it's those “little differences”.

This version rules that you are not allowed to use plural nouns or third person singular verbs in present tense. This rule immediately rules out a tonne of words…including “rules”.

ZX Ordle is clearly programmed by someone with a sense of humour. The instructions are playful and there's even the option to save your stats to tape. I don't know about you but I love the idea of having a rack of C15 tapes full of your ZX Ordle stats.



```
Type your words
Press <0> to give up
Press <1> to "BackSpace"

YOU WIN !!!
```

Are you taking the p<censored> ?

The dictionary seems pretty sound. I had many goes at this and none of the words that it threw at me had me Googling their meaning, something that can’t be said for the NYT version.

I also like the way you're given a rating, providing an unexpected incentive to get out of the ‘harmless’ ranking and progress.

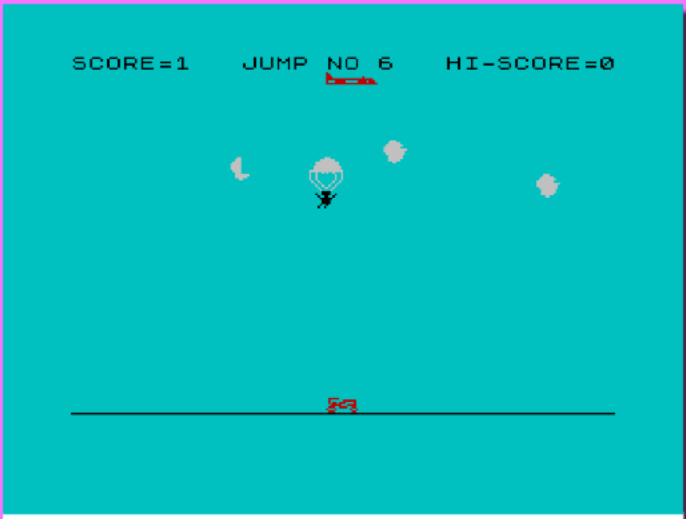
Best of all, you don't get stupid American spellings ruining a good streak…favor indeed!

Stunt Man

Spectrum Brothers

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44258/

PWYW / $2



Look out below!

Sloany’s Review

Stunt Man is not, as I first thought, a prequel to Codemasters' Super Stunt Man.

The game was written in 1982 by brothers Keith & Brian Holloway and kept in storage until now, easily making it the oldest “new” game I've reviewed to date.

So, is there fun to be had from something written in BASIC 43 years ago by, I assume, a couple of kids? Why yes, yes there is!

Anyone familiar with early 80s type ins and/or LCD handheld games of the era will immediately appreciate the simple fun there is to be derived here.

Press any key to make our titular hero jump out of a plane & use 'n' & 'm' to steer him safely on to a speeding motorbike. (Or see him splattered unceremoniously on the tarmac.)

“It’s not imm
whether it's
stunt men o
really resi

You have ten goes at this and your final score is the number of successful attempts made.

It's not immediately clear whether it's 10 different stunt men or one really really resilient one : my conscience hopes it's the latter.

For a game so simple, it's an addictive little blighter as you try to better your score & get that elusive perfect 10.

As both a curiosity and a bit of fun this is well worth a download. I'm not sure why they kept it under wraps all this time; maybe they were waiting for the advent of Break Space for a proper review.
(Well worth the wait, if you ask me -Ed)

The Secret of Sloany's Success

Start with the words
PLAIN, THOSE & RUGBY.
That way you bring all the vowels, (including Y) & most of the more commonly used consonants into play and have 3 goes to solve the thing. It never fails - except when it does.

(Wow. -Ed)

FR David, a man who embodies the BreakSpace aesthetic

Mpk's Comment

My tip for Wordle is to play the same first word every day and when you eventually get it in 1, take a screenshot, send it to everyone you know, declare yourself Champion of Wordle and retire from the game. 'ABOUT', 27 June 2023, if you're wondering.

Or play the version where you have 32 wordles at once. That's pretty cool.

ZXordle is pretty cool as well, although it does raise serious question about how we're supposed to pronounce it. Zed Ecks Ordle? Zucksordle? Inquiring minds must know.

Tongues thoroughly twisted, all that's left is to play the game. The dictionary is impressive, and the interface is simplistic but clear. No faffing about with menus or options here - you just type in your word and get your results. There's a nice little fanfare when you win, which is about as flashy as you are getting.

But if you're the kind of person who wants to play Wordle, and maybe even track your statistics, then flashy is not what you're after.

To sum up, ZX Ordle's title may be a linguistic atrocity, but the game itself is a solid success.

Al's Comment

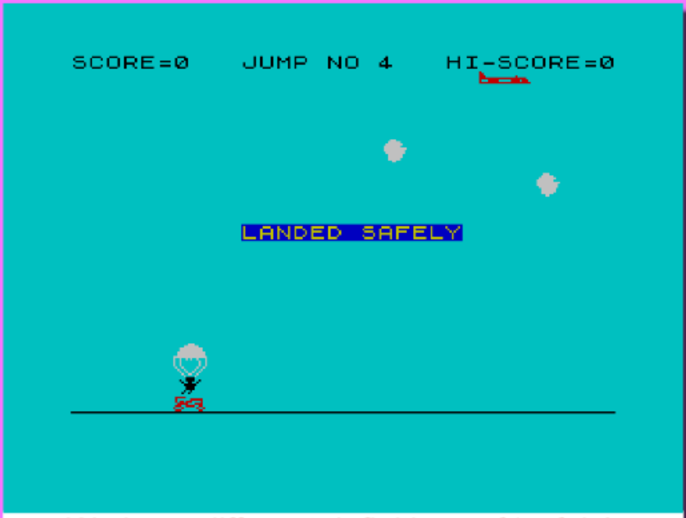
Made in 1982, eh? I guess these guys found this one on an old dusty C60 somewhere in the attic. I really miss my erm, 'copied for my own use only' tapes of old. My dad threw them all out when I went to uni, only keeping my originals, in fear of the FBI turning the place over.

ediately clear
10 different
r one really
lient one"

An awful lot of stuff on those C60 tapes didn't load of course, but tragically some of my old pathetic programming attempts were saved on there too. Plus the only known copy of my mate's epic text adventure series set in our old school. All lost, all gone. Sob.

Okay, I'm alright, I can do this.

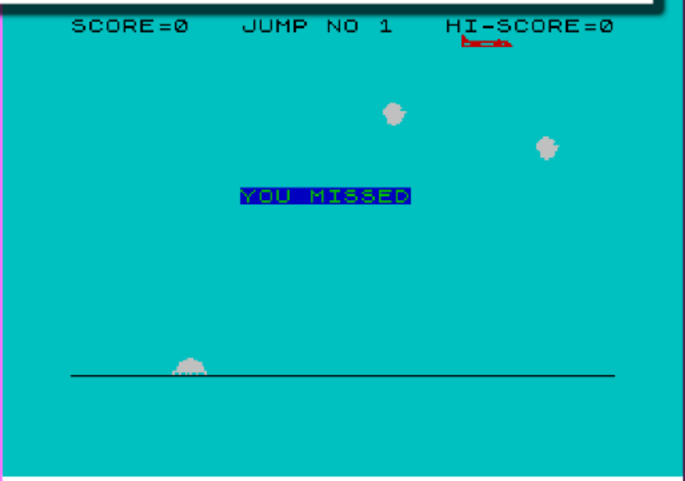
Well it's a bit odd in 2025 to be playing an old BASIC game from 5 minutes after the Speccy was born. But we eat, drink and crap retro round here, so let's do it! Okay, you have to aim your man for the.... I want to say tractor? Maybe 'Stunt Farmer' might be more accurate. 10 goes and probably 10 gory jam splats on the ground I reckon. It's not a bad little prog really. Better than most magazine type-ins for sure, in that it works and runs fast enough. I eventually managed a 50% mortality rate, boasting five lucky survivors. So overall, Stuntman was well worth unearthing and is a fine exponent of the colour we all know as cyan. Not turquoise, cyan.



```
SCORE=0     JUMP NO 4     HI-SCORE=0

LANDED SAFELY
```

We have different definitions of 'safely'.



```
SCORE=0     JUMP NO 1     HI-SCORE=0

YOU MISSED
```

Lee Majors never had to put up with this.

Driar

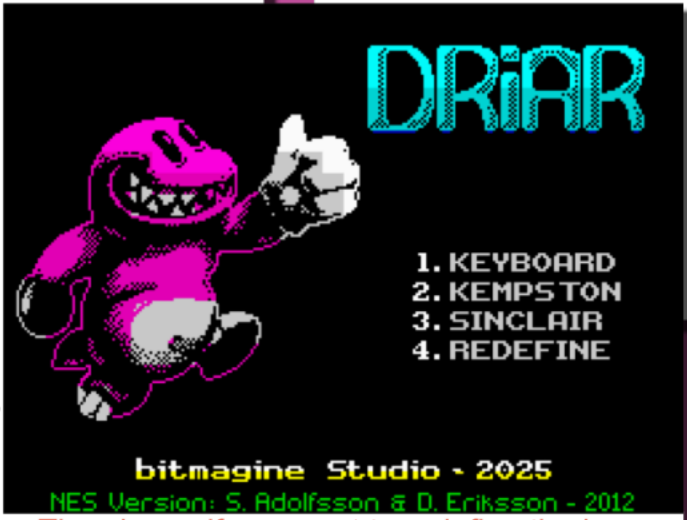
Bitmagine
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44229
PWYW / $2

Eye candy. Visual dessert. Ocular confectionery. Optic pudding. I could go on, but I won't because I can't think of any more. I'm basically saying this game looks fabulous. After a long playing session, you'll switch off and the rest of the world will look distinctly drab and NON-BRIGHT for a while. I'd say it looks even better than the 2012 NES game it's ported from; and I'm not saying that in the "ackshually I prefer 80% cocoa chocolate to Dairy Milk" way—I really mean it.

I shouldn't spaff on about the graphics so much because Driar is also great fun to play. It's a very solid 30 levels of collect-em-up fun. You play as Driar the Dinosaur, though a pedantic palaeontologist would more likely class it as Driar the cute amorphous blob. The original NES game cited The Mojon Twin's "UWOL: Quest For Money" as an influence, and it shows through here as it shows through there: we have single screen levels with off-edge wrapping, though it's very much its own game and I'm pleased it goes with a normal & turbo jump instead of UWOL's inertia.

The 30 levels are adapted, not block-for-block, from a choice selection of the NES game's 38. The challenge, apart from not being distracted by the graphics, lies in the games turbo mechanic. With the fire button pressed, you can run instead of walk, and jump BIG instead of short. You have to gauge how best to do this, sometimes jumping off the edge of one screen to the other. Baddies go up & down or left & right, as per some trusty Platform Game directive (probably 16384, section A), but the ghosts break convention and can travel through walls.

Some screens miss a trick and give the player too easy a ride, but the difficulty gradient more or less increases as you go. Perhaps a bit of reordering towards the end would help, for example the very imposing level 28 feels like a full-stop should follow it. Anyway, Driar is no cake-walk (enough about sweets! - Ed) and with 5 lives you'll need a lot of replays before you complete it. I'm glad this game doesn't have a time limit, as so many in its genre do—this is a ride where you'll want to savour the sweet sweet scenery.



Thumbs up if you want to redefine the keys

Driar is a homebrew NES game from 2012 that somehow flew under my radar. It's heavily inspired by Uwol: The Quest for Money (Mojon Twins, 2009) for the ZX Spectrum - and now, in a delightful twist, Driar has been demade back to the Spectrum by prolific studio Bitmagine.

Let's be clear from the start: Driar is fantastic! The graphics are vibrant, the music catchy, the gameplay tight, and the level design superb. If you love flip-screen puzzle platformers, stop reading and play it now.

Still need convincing? Here's why it's great:

- Driar is a MPAGD game, but it doesn't feel like it: The run button adds Mario-like momentum, and speed boosts are crucial for progression.

- The Goal: Collect all stars in each level - grab the last one, and you're done. Simple, and satisfying.

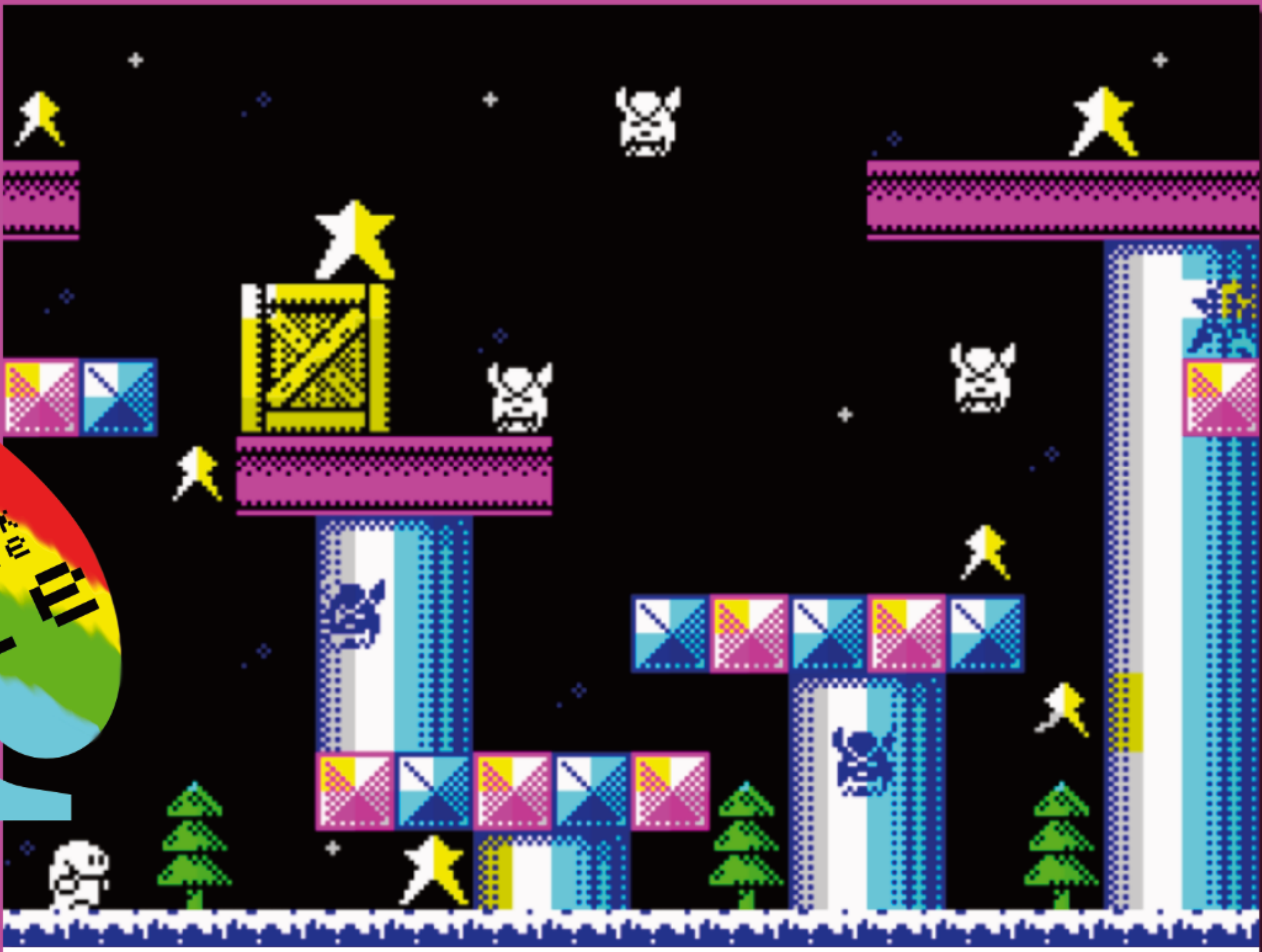
- Spectrum-optimized visuals: Bitmagine brilliantly adapts the NES aesthetic, using bright and dark color contrasts to create viberant levels.

- Precise controls: fair collisions, and deliberate movement put you in the driving seat.

- Balanced challenge: Easier than the NES original but still tough - ghost levels can be tricky and late-stage jumps demand bravery!

The demake makes minor concessions (fewer collectibles, adjusted level layouts for Spectrum resolution), but it's so polished it barely feels like a downgrade. I'd have loved playing this in the '80s.

I fell down the rabbit hole, playing Driar's NES original and Uwol too. All three are worth your time. Convinced yet? Good. Go play.



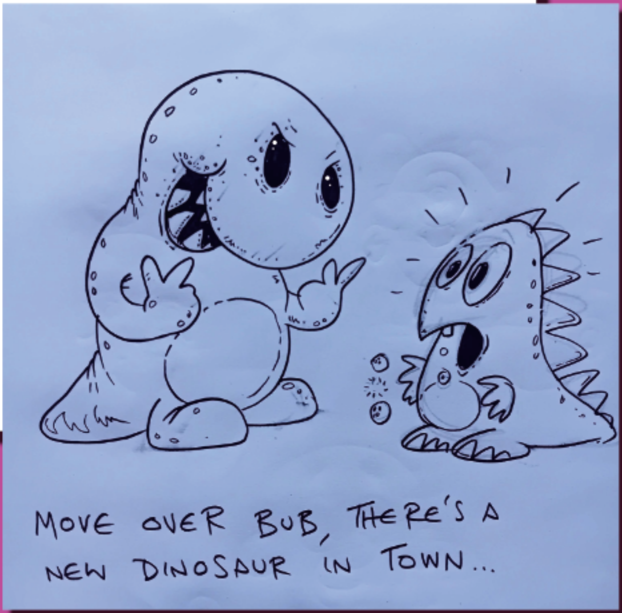
There's a Starrrr Barrrr wayting in the sky...

It's quite gratifying, doncha think, when folk convert games from more modern systems onto the Speccy. Like Hollow Knight, or some guy even attempted Dead Space I remember. Not entirely sure that one bore much resemblance, but the thought was there. Conversely I noticed the other day that there's a new PS5 title out called.. Beyond The Ice Palace II. What a crazy mixed-up world we live in!

As Dave has cannily revealed, the oddly-named 'Herr' Driar (well he might be German) began life on the NES but has thankfully found a home on a proper computer now (ouch, topical unprovoked NES burn there). Well, let's face it, no other system does offensively bright retina-burning action like our beloved Spectrum. The clue's in the name innit?

Being very shallow I can forgive a game most things if it's purty looking. And Driar sure is a looker, the graphics are uber-cute, especially our dino hero, even if he does remind me more than a little of a certain crusher-dodging mole. Colour is used with gay abandon, which I like, and it's got a mega tune which I also like. Big ticks across the board.

As for gameplay : it's a joy really. A platformer these days has to inject a degree of originality if it's going to stand out, and here the idea of a wrap-around screen and a turbo boost fit that bill nicely. It's true that the difficulty level isn't always quite what it might be, but this isn't a Souls game, it's there to be enjoyed. So enjoy it. Please. Thank you!



MOVE OVER BUB, THERE'S A NEW DINOSAUR IN TOWN...

Animated Al Accurately Answers Assorted Asks.

Sloany comes over all Alan Whicker, and has a friendly word with Youtube superstar Animated AL, whose BASIC tutorials have been catching our collective eye...

Since the successful launch of Retro Games Limited's "The Spectrum" in November 2024, gamers of a certain vintage have been rekindling their love for the Speccy's simple charms and kick-ass games.

One such Spec-chum has taken this further and started doing some actual coding on the darn thing. Not only that but he's very kindly sharing this knowledge that he is acquiring though the excellent YouTube series. "The Spectrum - Learning BASIC. LET'S MAKE A GAME"

Alex Cooper began posting Speccy videos on his "Animated ALex" YouTube channel in January 2025. The videos have covered a variety of BASIC tricks and techniques that will be of interest to any budding programmer.

What I love about Al's videos is the fact that you feel like you are going on a journey of discovery with him. He isn't professing to be an all knowing programming god, just a knowledgeable and likeable guy who is tinkering about, making games and trying to replicate some machine code classics in Speccy BASIC.

Suitably impressed with his endeavours, I recently got in touch with Alex to try to find out a bit more behind the man behind the channel behind the games.

•*Sloany : Alex, thank you for taking the time out to answer a few questions, I'd like to start by asking you about how you first got into the ZX Spectrum. Did you do any coding on the Speccy back in the day, or was it all playing games?*

Al : Yes, i did some coding back in the day. At around 11 years old i made my first BASIC game. It was called Monster Truck, a simple game of guiding a graphic truck around a course, avoiding objects and scoring points if you crushed a car. It wasn't brilliant but to me it was. I did play games, although I had more of an interest wanting know how to make a game. I spent a lot of time typing in type-ins from magazines and learning that way.

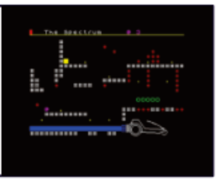
•*That sounds like fun! What were your favourite games back then?*

Games that I enjoyed playing? Chuckie Egg, Monty Mole, Dizzy, Atic Atac, Zzoom, Jet Set Willy, and 3D Starstrike are the ones i remember the most.

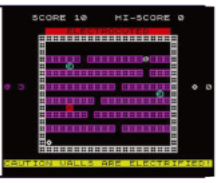
•*What inspired you to begin making your online tutorials?*

When The Spectrum from Retro Games Ltd was released all i wanted to do was learn how to program correctly, not like i did when i was i kid. After reading various posts in some Facebook ZX Spectrum groups i could see others wanting to do the same, as

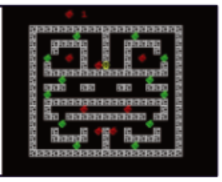
SPECCY
A platformer reviewed in our first issue, SPECCY was described as "charming" by Dave and I, for one, agree.



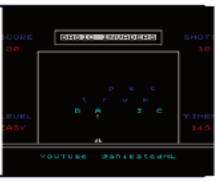
SPECCY : The Diamond Thief
Tea-leaf capers in a shifting maze.
Shine on, you crazy diamond thief.



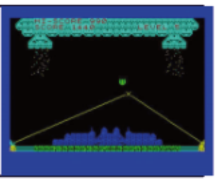
Mouldy Strawberry
Single screen maze based fun. Collect fresh strawberries, avoid mouldy ones & grab the cream. Anyone for tennis?



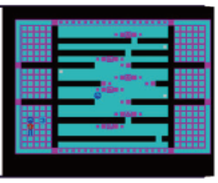
BASIC Invaders
It's BASICally Space Invaders, but with words!



Invasion
Missile Command style shenanigans, save those cities.



Sinclair BASIC: The Game
Meta mayhem as you tackle a virus that threatens to destroy the very language the game was coded in.



coding questions were being asked. So, I thought, I'm going to share my programming journey and hopefully i can offer some help too in the the form of YouTube tutorials.

•*I noticed that you have had a stab at coding two stone cold classics (Manic Miner and Deathchase) in BASIC, what have been the main challenges and do you plan on tackling any other classics?*

Re-creating some of the classics in Sinclair BASIC, well. I wanted to bring something different and interesting to the channel, and challenge myself with BASIC programming, I'm no expert by any means, there are many commands i haven't even learnt yet, but, with doing the re-creation of the ZX Spectrum classic games series, i soon had to learn new methods and commands. It's been an enjoyable journey. I had originally only planned to do the Manic Miner recreation, my version being Slow Manic Willy, The video did better than i expected and with the interest from viewers i decided to keep going, and currently i'm now on a DEATH CHASE remake, which was a challenge set by the viewers of my channel. I like to get the viewers involved as much as possible - the thing i actually enjoy most is the comment section. Experienced programmers giving their advice and opinions is very rewarding and it's amazing how many still enjoy seeing what can be done on a Speccy with Sinclair BASIC. The biggest challenge with these projects has been speed. BASIC isn't the quickest, therefore i do compile the finished BASIC program with Mcoder3 and the results so far have been worthwhile.

•*What kind of feedback have you had from the Speccy community?*

I never expected the channel to take off like it has. I mean the channel is still small as far as YouTube channels go, but it has become very overwhelming, in a good way. I get a lot of positivity and appreciation back, which has encouraged me to keep going.

•*What advice would you give to anybody thinking about tinkering with coding on the Spectrum?*

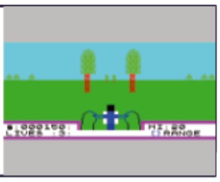
Advice to others : do it!! Whether it be BASIC or Machine Code. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, it's the best way and only way to learn. I personally like the old method of learning, from a book, but there is loads of information and tutorials on the internet, a perk that wasn't available back in the 1980's. I really had little programming knowledge when i started learning BASIC seriously from November 2024, i've now an itch account with 12 games that i've made on there, so, if i can do it, anyone can.

•*And do you have any plans to move on to ASM after mastering BASIC?*

'Never say never' as they say. I have started looking into it, so maybe in the future, but for now i am still enjoying learning Sinclair BASIC. I am seriously thinking, depending on the price tag, of buying the new ZX-SPECTRUM NEXT when it's released next month. I've heard that the NEXT BASIC is a lot more efficient, so there maybe an opportunity for me there to create games for the NEXT.

Thanks very much for your time Al!
Al's games are available on Itch, and here are some examples of the games you can try yourself!

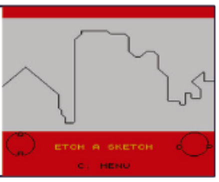
3D Death Crawl
Al's greatest achievement to date, a playable BASIC version of Your Sinclair's "Greatest game of all time"



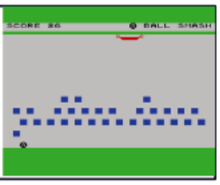
Slow Manic Willy
Matthew Smith's classic, but a bit more BASIC.

The BASIC Cavern

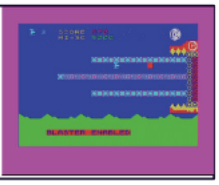
Hungry Pixel
It's that CSSCGC favourite Etch-a-Sketch!



8-Ball Smash
Thro' the Wall, but upside down…Thro' the Floor?



B-Type
R-Type but in BASIC. Talk about ambitious.



Bird Strike
Protect the planes by shooting down a Flock of Seagulls. Please be assured that no 80s new wave bands were harmed in the making of this game.

Find the Beer!!
The lights are out and you're stumbling about in the dark looking for booze just like a power cut at Break Space HQ.

FIND THE BEER!!

BREAK SPACE - THE GAME !

What's more relaxing than typing in a BASIC listing of an evening, carefully transcribing from a magazine onto your Speccy, checking for bugs and typos, and finally getting to RUN the game?
Well, we wouldn't know, here at BreakSpace Towers, as we're constantly panicking to get the next issue out on time. 3 months goes by in a flash. A FLASH 1, even!
YOU can help out though, by moving the required letters to the top of the screen!
A classic BASIC type-in provided by your pal and ours - Animated AL!

DH 30/06/2025

```
10 REM *** BreakSpace Game ***
20 PAPER 1: BORDER 1: INK 7\{i0}: CLS
25 GO SUB 600
30 REM *** GAME LOOP ***
40 LET t=t+1
50 LET x=x+(IN 57342=190 AND x<21)-(IN
57342=189 AND x>8)
60 LET y=y+(IN 65022=190 AND y<18)-(IN
64510=190 AND y>4)
65 IF ATTR (y,x)=10 OR ATTR (oy,ox)=10 THEN
BEEP 0.04,-20: LET l=l-1: GO SUB 500
70 IF SCREEN$ (y,x)="*" THEN BEEP 0.02,12:
LET s=s+1
75 IF oy<>y OR ox<>x THEN PRINT AT
oy,ox;CHR$ 128;
80 PRINT AT y,x; INK 6;c$(e)
85 LET a=a+b: LET c=c-d
90 LET oy=y: LET ox=x
95 IF i=2 THEN IF t=8 THEN BEEP 0.04,-30:
LET n=2
100 IF t=12 THEN BEEP 0.004,-5: LET n=1:
LET t=0
120 REM *** TEXT MOVEMENT ***
130 LET b=b+(a<6)-(a>11)
140 PRINT AT 6,a;CHR$ 128; INK 2;a$; INK
7;CHR$ 128;AT 10,a;CHR$ 128; INK 2;a$; INK
7;CHR$ 128;AT 14,a;CHR$ 128; INK 2;a$; INK
7;CHR$ 128;
150 LET d=d+(c>13)-(c<6)
160 PRINT AT 12,c;CHR$ 128; INK 2;b$; INK
7;CHR$ 128;AT 8,c;CHR$ 128; INK 2;b$; INK
7;CHR$ 128;
170 IF y=4 THEN GO SUB 300
180 IF i=2 THEN PRINT INK n;AT
7,8;"▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞";AT
11,8;"▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞";AT
15,8;"▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞▞"
```

NOTE - in Line 180, you ‘ll need to activate the Graphics mode cursor to enter the special characters. Toggle graphics mode ON/Off with CAPS Shift+9. The character you need here is CAPS SHIFT + 6 while in Graphics mode. There are 3 rows, with 14 characters in each.

Don’t forget to toggle Graphics mode off again with SHIFT+9 and continue typing normally.

```
200 GO TO 40

300 REM *** LETTER COUNT ***

305 IF s<4 THEN BEEP 0.03,-12: LET y=18: LET x=15: RETURN

310 BEEP 0.003,12: BEEP 0.02,12

315 PRINT AT g,f; INK 7;c$(e)

320 LET e=e+1: LET f=f+1: PRINT AT y,x;CHR$ 128: LET y=18

325 IF e=11 THEN GO SUB 535

330 IF e=6 THEN LET g=3: LET f=8: LET y=18: LET x=15

340 LET s=0: GO SUB 755

400 RETURN

500 REM *** GAME OVER ***

510 PRINT AT 4,26; INK 6;l

515 LET y=18: LET x=15

520 IF l=0 THEN FOR o=-50 TO 20: BEEP 0.05,o: PRINT AT 20,7; FLASH 1; INK 2; PAPER 0;"G A M E  O V E R": NEXT o: PAUSE 0: GO TO 10

530 RETURN

535 REM *** ISSUE COUNT ***

540 IF e=11 THEN FOR h=0 TO 21: BEEP 0.01,(40-(h/2)): PRINT AT 20,5; INK INT (RND*6);"NEW ISSUE DISTRIBUTED": NEXT h: LET i=i+1: PRINT INK 1;AT 20,5;"NEW ISSUE DISTRIBUTED";AT 2,8;"BREAK";AT 3,8;"SPACE": LET e=1: LET g=2: LET f=8: LET y=18: LET x=15

550 IF i>=3 THEN CLS : FOR h=0 TO 21: BEEP 0.005,(30+(h/2)): PRINT AT 10,11; INK INT (RND*6);"WELL DONE": NEXT h: PAUSE 0: GO TO 10

555 PRINT AT 8,26; INK 5;i

560 LET s=0: GO SUB 755

580 RETURN

600 REM *** VARIABLES ***

610 LET s=0: LET l=3: LET i=1: LET a=6: LET b=1: LET c=13: LET d=1: LET e=1: LET f=8: LET g=2

620 LET t=0: LET n=2: LET y=18: LET oy=y: LET x=15: LET ox=x

625 LET a$="ZX SPECTRUM": LET b$="B A S I C": LET c$="BREAKSPACE "
```

```
630 REM *** SCREEN SET UP ***

635 PRINT AT 6,4;"BreakSpace are 2 issues";
AT 7,4;"short of making their";AT
8,4;"deadline due to the print";AT
9,4;"missing from the title."

640 PRINT AT 11,4;"Complete the title!!!";
AT 12,4;"Guide the letters to the";AT
13,4;"top of the page collecting";AT
14,4;"the stars on your way.";AT 16,4;"O/P
= Left and Right";AT 17,4;"Q/A = Up and
Down"

645 PRINT #1;TAB 10; INK 3;"by Animated AL"

650 PRINT AT 19,4; INK 6;"PRESS ANY KEY TO
PLAY"

655 PRINT AT 3,14; INK (RND*6);"BREAK";AT
4,14;"SPACE"

660 IF INKEY$<>"" THEN CLS : GO TO 700

665 BEEP 0.03,INT (RND*20)

670 GO TO 655

700 REM *** SCREEN SET UP ***

710 PLOT 39,20: DRAW 161,0: DRAW 0,150:
DRAW -161,0: DRAW 0,-150

720 PLOT 0,20: DRAW 0,135: PLOT 20,170:
DRAW 0,-165: DRAW 200,0: DRAW 0,90

730 PLOT 10,165: DRAW 0,-155: PLOT 230,85:
DRAW 0,-75: PLOT 240,80: DRAW 0,-65: PLOT
250,70: DRAW 0,-50

735 PLOT 63,30: INK 2: DRAW 0,105: PLOT
176,30: DRAW 0,105: INK 0

740 PRINT AT 2,20; BRIGHT 1; PAPER 2; INK
6;"\ :"; PAPER 4; INK 5;"\ :"; BRIGHT 0

750 PRINT AT 2,26; INK 6;"LIVES ";AT
4,26;l;AT 6,26; INK 5;"ISSUE";AT 8,26;i

755 PRINT INK 4;AT 9,8; FLASH 1;"*";AT
9,21;"*";AT 13,8;"*";AT 13,21;"*"; FLASH 0

760 RETURN

780 STOP

800 REM Program by Animated AL
```

GORF

Deanysoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/

PWYW / £x

Sloany's Review

I've always loved GORF. It plays like a mini greatest hits package of those early single screen shoot-em-ups and yet somehow manages to be its own thing. I recently rediscovered my love for it at a retro event, where I had a fun high score challenge with my good buddy Peter Mulholland (Hi Pete!).

Unusually for a popular early '80s arcade game of this type, there haven't been many attempts to convert it to the Spectrum, official or otherwise. This seems particularly odd when you think about how well suited it is to the Speccy's unique set of skills. One of the few attempts on record from back in the day was C-Tech's dreadful "Gorfian Invaders", which had more bugs than DreamWorks 1998 classic Antz.

So can Deanysoft's version fill that GORF shaped gap in the Speccy's library? Well, without wanting to give away too much too soon, Hell yes it can! Everything about this game stays as true to the original as it's possible to get without scouring internet auction sites for 2nd hand cabinets.

For the uninitiated, there are five looping levels in GORF and, unlike the games that inspired it, you can move vertically (within a certain range) and you hold down the fire button to control the length of time your bullet remains on the screen. Both of which provide a bit of a fresh challenge to the classic formula.

First off we have "Astro Blasters" which is essentially Space Invaders; except you have a Simpsons Movie style dome protecting you, which disappears to let your bullets through & gets depleted by enemy fire.

The second level, "Laser Attack" is probably the most original stage in the game. Here you face off against ten aliens who attack you in two teams of five, each with four Kamikaze dive bombers and one big shooty laser guy.

Next up we have "Galaxians", a straight up Galaxian clone, which is great because Galaxian is great.

The penultimate level, "Space Warp" sees you flying into a tunnel. It's a bit like Tempest, but not really. The baddies fly down the tunnel towards you and you can blast them (and their bullets). This is probably the toughest level in the game.

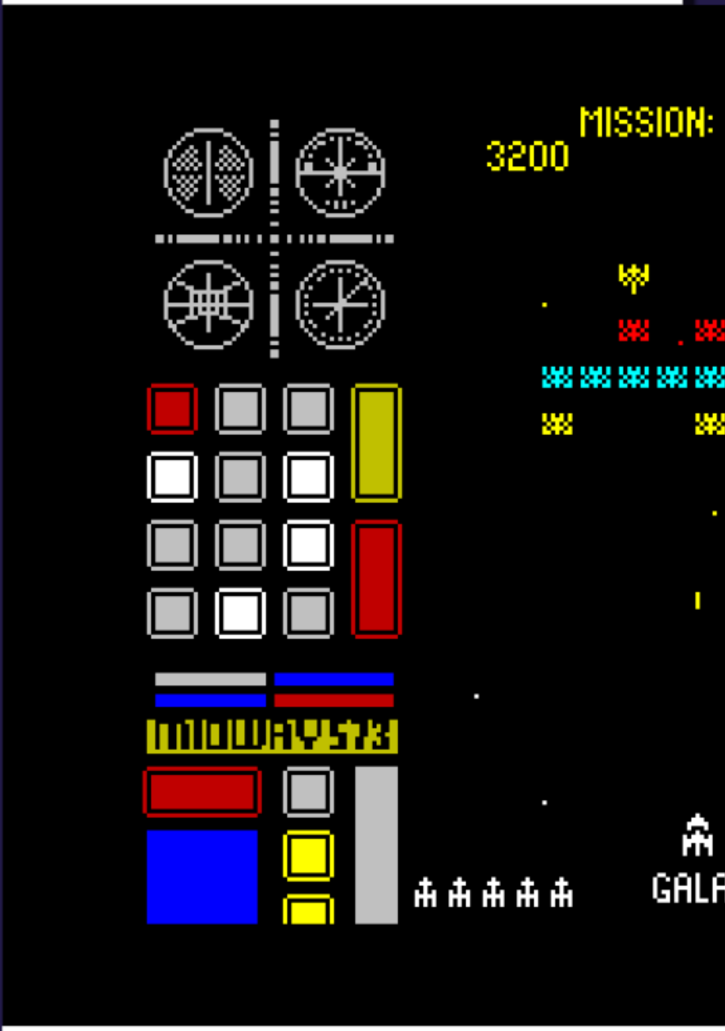
Finally "Flag Ship" is the big boss level where you have to expose the mothership's soft underbelly to blast it out of the stars, Phoenix style. The protect-o-dome is back but this time it's protecting the baddie, and you have to chip away at it. This level also has a neat risk/reward element where you can dislodge bits of the ship for extra points, but the debris is deadly and must be avoided.

Once you get through all that, you then get to do it all over again for points.

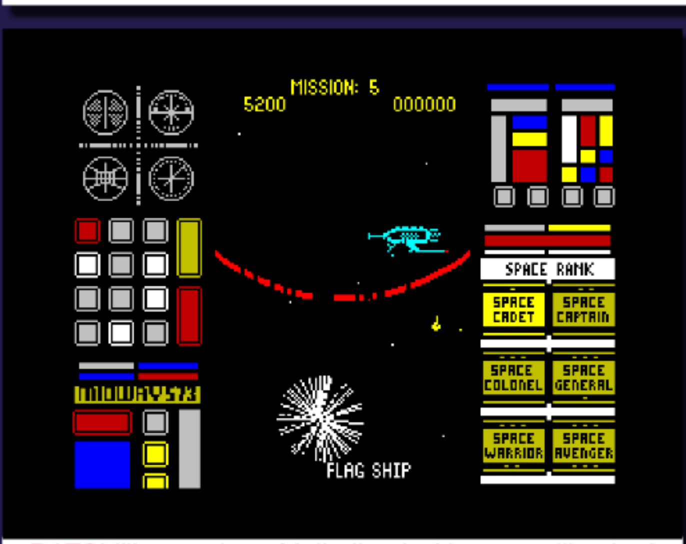
Everything from the arcade original is in here and it just feels right. There's a nice choice of 3, 6 or 9 lives, with different high scores for each so you can move down the lives once you git gud.

This version of GORF not only looks the part with its colourful bezel & spot on graphics but it's an absolute joy to play.

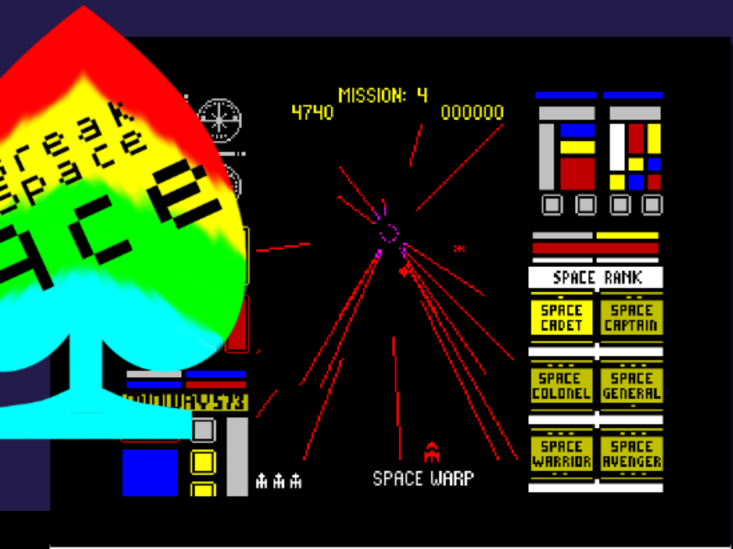
So yeah, now we have GORF on the Speccy. Top top work Deanysoft - and the next time I meet up with Pete we'll definitely be having a face off on this one. So if you're reading this Matey, you'd best get some practice in.



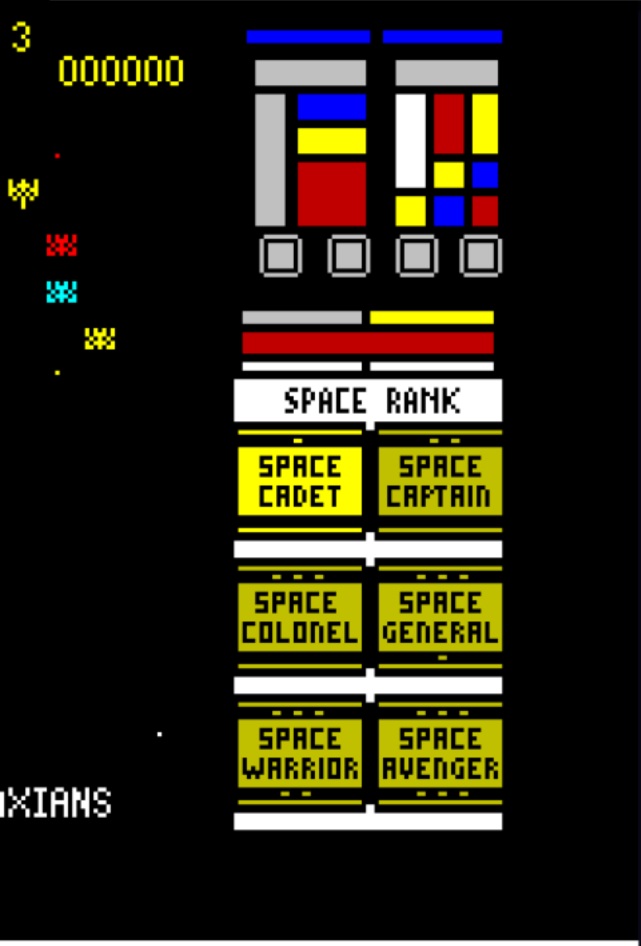
That man is playing Galaxians



RATS! I'll never beat Mulholland with moves like that!



Oooh, you are GORFul, but I like you.



Chapell‘s Comment

Five.
Six.

Five Six Seven Eight

GORF got a little, not enough attention
It had a lot of class, and some nice invention
Best bit was the voice, and the pilot’s joystick
3 years since Invaders, presentation so slick.

Can Speccy GORF match that heat?
A tall order for poor Deany
I don’t want this to face defeat
It’s a dream game for me, dream game for me

G-O-R-F-O-M-G
All the levels, lots to see
Try and see how far you get
Get promoted, Space Cadet
(x2)

(Chorus)
Gee-Oh-Or-Eff-Oh-Em-Gee
You have got to play and see
Gee-Oh-Or-Eff-Oh-Em-Gee
Just how good this game can be

It all plays out so smooth, it’s so impressive
Looks a million bucks, perfect retrogressive
You don’t have to pay, just go download it
Deany’s got some some chops and he’s really shown it!

(Chorusx2)

Okay, that’s it from me for now!
GORF’s hot, try it out. Grip that stick, flick those buttons! It’s a GORFININOMENON !
You’ll love it, trust me! Wooh!

(Thanks to Chappel Roan for taking time out from her role as Ascendent Global Pop Empress to review GORF for us! What a scoop!

Next issue, Ariana Grande compares the Pasmo and Zeus assembler environments - Ed)

Al‘s Comment

Wow, is it me or are Spectrum games getting older? Is it true that GORF actually pre-dates our fave micro? On this basis it can't be long before we get Pong RX with lovingly recreated Binatone colour and sound, and maybe those paddles with the dially knobs as a hardware add-on. Wait. That would be awesome.

Despite the scribbly title on my review tape copy which the Ed threw at my head this morning (None of this is true, you understand, it's merely a very laboured set-up for a seriously lame pun, but you must admit it lends my piece a bit more of a nostalgic feel, don't you think? And we all love a bit of that don't we? Sorry, back to the payoff) this game has very little to do with golf. *(It’s not even a pun! - Ed)* I'll get my coat now.

No it's actually a veritable smorgasbord (or big ass buffet to you) of fairly simple prehistoric blast em ups, but nicely done all the same. I guess for maximum satisfaction "you had to be there,maaan" and to have enjoyed the original to extract the most out of this canny conversion. But even if you weren't, you can still enjoy a bit of crazy GOLF, sorry GORF, in the year 2025, it's not a crime. While you're waiting eagerly for Pong RX. Drool.

Beat the Bookie

Spectrum Brothers

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44238

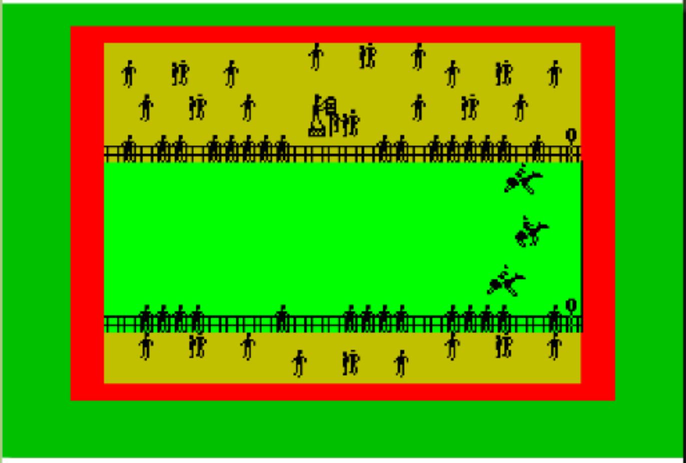
PWYW / £x

Jamie‘s Review

Beat the Bookie is a free Spectrum game - and as they say, you shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth. It's mostly written in BASIC, and the authors claim they coded it over 40 years ago. If that’s true those guys really knew how to hold their horses. Can I include more equine idioms? No, because I'm champing at the bit to get on with this review.

Enough horsing around. Beat the Bookie is exactly what it says - a vintage horse racing game finally released after four decades in the stable. Why the delay? Your guess is as good as mine. But the game's age gives it a certain retro charm.

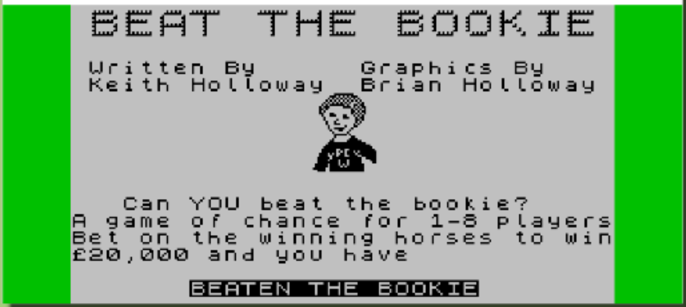
Gameplay is simple: you start with £100 and bet each round on one of three horses. Then comes the highlight - the final furlong plays out in real time. This is where the game shines. The smooth animation actually shows horses moving faster than a snail's pace, accompanied by enjoyable music. The presentation is excellent!



Jack’s Been To The National

Beyond this, there's not much more to it. You'll repeat the betting process, occasionally winning but mostly losing (just like real bookies!). I eventually went bust, triggering some nicely presented mockery from the bookie. It's a fun little time-waster worth trying for 5 minutes - maybe you'll have better luck actually beating the bookie.

I could end with another bad pun... but that would be like flogging a dead horse. (I regret nothing).



BEAT THE BOOKIE

Written By
Keith Holloway

Graphics By
Brian Holloway

Can YOU beat the bookie?
A game of chance for 1-8 players
Bet on the winning horses to win
£20,000 and you have

BEATEN THE BOOKIE

Mpk‘s Comment

Gambling eh? It’s ruining sports, lives, culture at large. Athletes have spoken out about the regular abuse and threats they get from losers, one in 40 people in the UK are classified as ‘problem gamblers’, and you can barely open your eyes these days without seeing a colourful advert for some manner of betting site.

Oh well. Never mind. It’s fun!

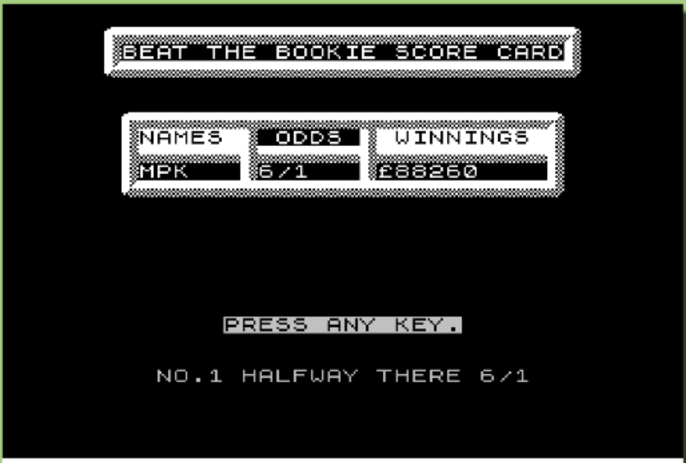
Most fun, of course, is a day out at the races. Grab a drink, study the form. Check out the horses in the parade ring. (If you’ve not seen a horse before, imagine a kind of Formula One cow.) Then, pick the one with the funniest name. Figure out whether the bookies or the Tote are your best option. Hand over a few quid and go shout at a fundamentally meaningless race for a few minutes. Celebrate / commiserate with your party and do it again. Tremendous.

Beat the Bookie focuses on the gambling part, of course, as a game about, let’s say, wandering about a field looking for your car after the races is less appealing. The odds are inscrutable, with vanishingly little impact on the outcome. But not knowing what you’re doing is kind of the casual race-goers experience in a nutshell, so if the race is fun to watch then the maths don’t matter.

And the race *is* very nicely animated. The 3 horses gallop smoothly across the screen with the outcome often not clear until the very last stride. It can be oddly compelling, somehow, even though there’s no actual money on the line. All the thrill of a gamble without the chill of pawning your wedding ring. What more could you want?

(More than 3 horses, more detailed form guide, a selection of bookies, weather / turf conditons, jockey info, hot tips from a drunk guy in a bar who swears he knows the trainer of the 75-1 outsider. Loads of things, really.) But that’s just being churlish. As it stands, worth a flutter for a few minutes.

Most likely written before the boys were old enough to gamble. this is the second offering from the Spectrum Brothers recent auto-archaeology this issue, after Stunt Man a few pages back. Are there more tapes to come? We can only hope.



BEAT THE BOOKIE SCORE CARD

NAMES	ODDS	WINNINGS
MPK	6/1	£88260

PRESS ANY KEY.

NO.1 HALFWAY THERE 6/1

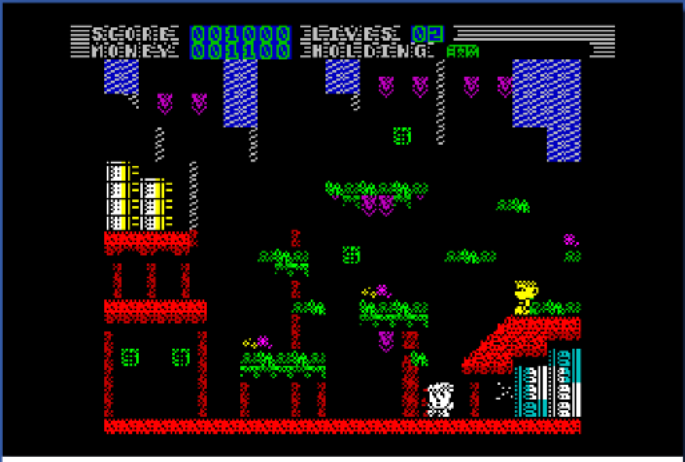
Bookie status : Beaten

Welcome to Chump Town

KTB Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44237

PWYW / $2



Top Chump

Jamie's Review

Chump Town is a quirky puzzle platformer made with MPAGD, themed around US politics, the rise of conspiracy theories, and the price of eggs. There's a lot to unpack here - like a carton of 6 eggs. Let's crack into it and see what kind of omelette all these inspirations make.

Politics aside, the goal is simple: search each level for an object that unlocks the exit. Levels consist of multiple screens with hard-to-reach areas. You'll find collectables (money), enemies that vaguely resemble President Trump, and even a massive Cybertruck patrolling certain areas.

The game's challenge - and unique selling point - lies in its jump mechanic. Once airborne, you can't correct your trajectory. You'll bounce off walls and ledges unpredictably, while hitting enemies from above sends you flying higher. The result is fun but chaotic, reminiscent of those infuriating Chucky Egg moments when you miss a lift jump and helplessly bounce to your doom.

Mastering these bounces is key to progress. You'll need to use enemies as springboards to reach high platforms and access new areas. Once I grasped this, I had great fun plotting my path through each level. The Cybertrucks prove particularly daunting - they're large sprites and often guard the most challenging spots.

Technically, the game shines as you'd expect from MPAGD. The AY music is fun, graphics are well-crafted, and visually distinct levels encourage exploration. Some rough edges remain - collectables occasionally reappear at odd times, and the jumping can feel unpredictably wild.

As for the political theme? It might leave some cold. I'm not thrilled to be reminded that billionaires run the show, though perhaps that's the point of Chump Town. The narrative leans heavily on "Trump bad" simplicity, oddly ignoring that egg prices soared under Biden. Maybe the sequel could be about escaping culture war tropes for a more nuanced political discourse?

Regardless, I genuinely enjoyed playing. The unique mechanics set it apart from typical MPAGD platformers, and its message hits home: we're all chumps here. So what kind of omelette does this make? A bloody good one!

Mpk's Comment

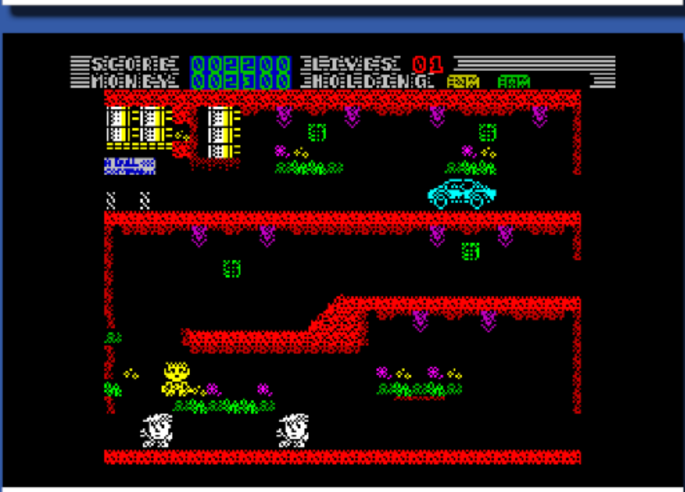
As a certified Chump myself, I was delighted to see this one pop up. Representation is important, of course, and while there have been great gains for Chumps globally in recent times, we tend not to get much rizz in the game space.

Side-on platformers are the bread and butter of the Spectrum world, so this feels immediately like familiar territory, right up until you jump and start bouncing around the blasted place. It's bread and I Can't Believe It's Not Butter, after all.

Figuring out an idiosyncratic jump mechanic is always welcome though, and this one manages to land just on the right side of frustrating. As Jamie notes, there will always be points where it catches you by surprise, multiplying a tiny error into a ping-ponging death. But it's consistent and forces the player to look at the levels more closely.

It's not a long game, but does have some replayability due to the collectible money tokens being entirely optional. You can breeze through lots of screens without bothering with the trickier sections at all, but can you sleep at night knowing that you didn't maximise your score? Probably, but there is that option to pursue. The game meanwhile wins itself some big points with an unexpected Ultimate tribute late on, followed by a (somewhat long-winded) genre shift at the end. This twist at the end is delightful, but could do with being maybe half as long - by that point, it's feeling less like a delight and more like a chore.

The main platforming section feels fresh and interesting throughout, though, and is the main attraction. All in all, you'd be a Chump to miss it.



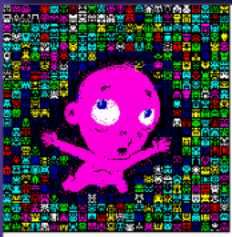
Cyber, Punks

Space Bros.

Molisoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44247

Free



This is an entry to the Bytemaniacos BASIC Contest 2025, and at the time of writing, Space Bros looks to be in a different weight category to the rest. Think Arnold Schwarzenegger vs Danny DeVito, who are, if the 1988 documentary 'Twins' is to be believed, brothers. In that film they didn't always see eye to eye, but fraternal collaboration saved the day, which is what the colour-coded kin Matt & Lars need here to escape Planet Arboreto.

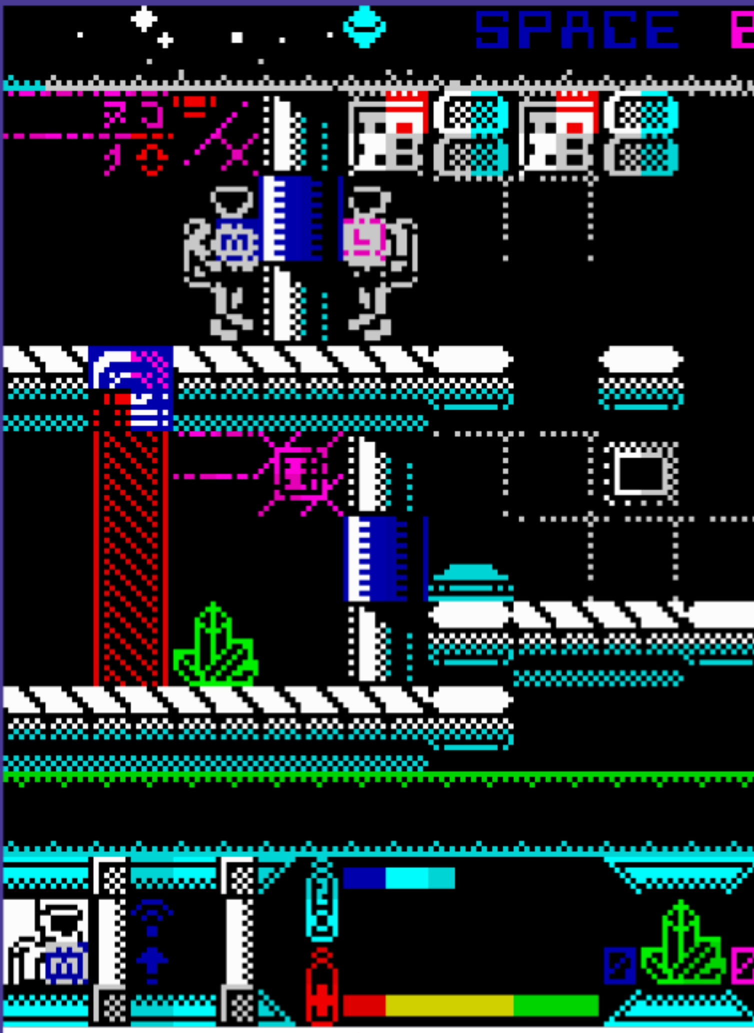
It's a heavyweight in every sense, taking 12 minutes 15 seconds to load all that code into several 128K RAM banks. Now that *is* long enough to have that apocryphal cup of tea so many reminisce about making back in the day. There's good reason for the wait: an opening screen worthy of a 1980's Technology programme, an animated intro, 5 zones, 48 screens, a minigame, and AY spot effects so varied I thought I had surround- sound. All of this may seem incongruous with BASIC, but the BORIEL compiler makes it very fast on its feet indeed.

Space Bros is an arcade adventure game, but with the twist of being able to switch between brothers, who start in different locations and have different objects in their inventory. The main goal is to find an energy cell to fuel your escape. Getting to that point requires finding objects, sending them to each other through teleports, and cutting 16 green crystals (in the minigame) to power keycards to allow you to explore.

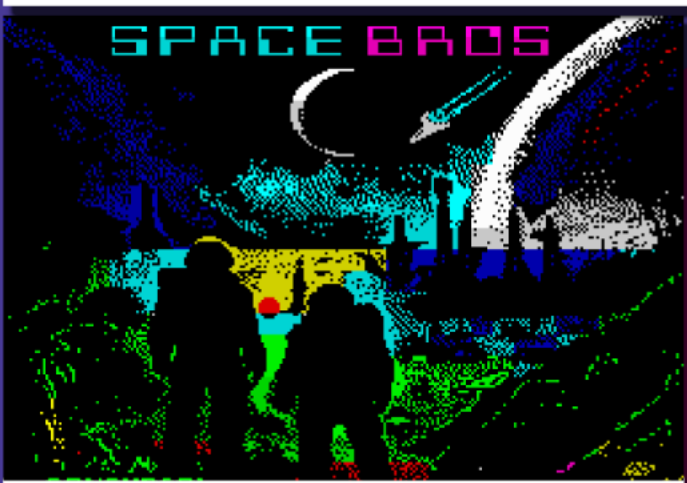
The central theme here is teamwork. For example certain doors require one brother to hold the lever while the other passes through, and this was the first time I had Matt & Lars on the same screen. I felt a frisson of tension when that happened, as Bulldog's FEUD has conditioned me to expect bad things to happen when siblings bump into one another. Thankfully Matt & Lars get on better than Learic & Leanoric, so if there ever was a time one gave the other a dead-arm or peed in the other's Lucozade, it's now water under the bridge.

Many screens have you quickly besieged with energy-sapping nasties and difficult to negotiate obstacles. If that's not jeopardy enough, you need to keep your oxygen topped up. Some would call this a layered and deep game. Personally I would have liked less action, so I could have more adventure.

However, this game was the fulfilment of a childhood dream for the author José Molina, and part of that was to make something that plays the way Speccy games used to play. The other part being to publish under 'Molisoft', a fantasy company he and his own brother dreamed up as youngsters. I applaud this labour of love, which may turn out to be an award winning one.



Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?



When will I, will I be famous?

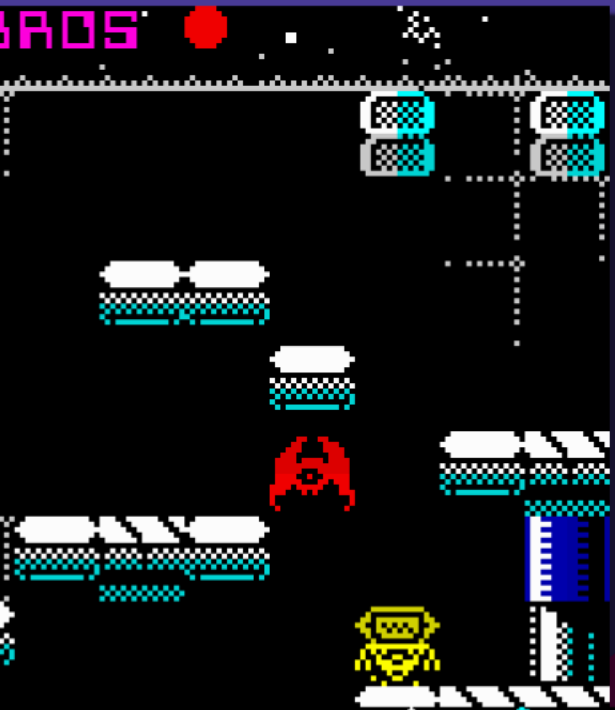
LOAD "How Long?"

So, the classic social media claim that 'games took an hour to load and if you died you had to load them again' is nonsense, but there's no doubt that they could drag on sometimes. While the average load time was between 3 and 4 minutes, some 128k titles took much longer.

Our extensive research* suggests that Starglider 128 was the longest-loading commercially released title, taking a leisurely 14 minutes and 22 seconds.

Natiurally, some CSSCGC games have 'fun' with the loading process, with Multiload Hangman from 2008 taking up almost 6 hours and 5 minutes of precious tape.
That's 25 C15s!

*Searching the phrase 'loading time' on the SC forums.



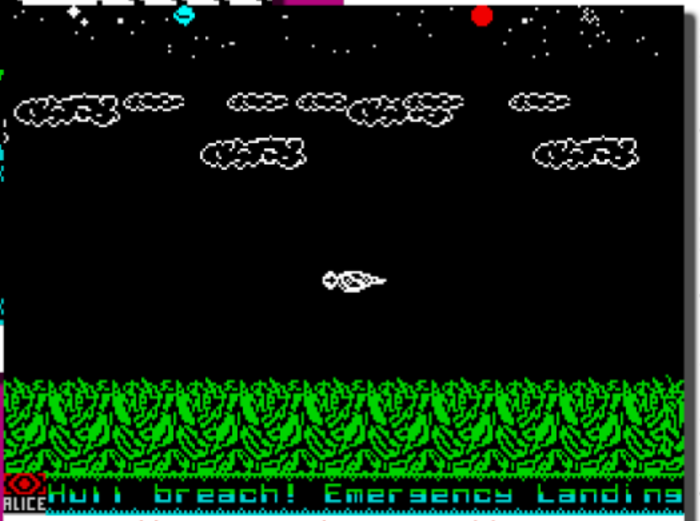
Space Bros, Bros in space! Conjuring up all sorts of images of Matt Goss, Luke Goss and the other one zooming around the cosmos, taking their unique brand of music to the the outer reaches of the known universe. But sadly no, Space Bros is not about the intergalactic adventures of the winners of both the “best group” and “worst group” gongs at the 1988 Smash Hits awards.

What it is however is a Boriel BASIC behemoth. After a lengthy intro that'd put some JRPGs to shame, Matt & Luke…sorry Matt & Lars crash land on an extremely colourful planet and must work together to recover the scattered ship parts to high tail it out of there.

Swapping between the protagonists Head over Heels style, you must navigate a hostile terrain with all sorts of nasties. The brothers are uniquely identified with a big M or L on their chest. Lars' L makes it look like he's a learner spaceman, which I bet Matt often silently chuckles about, although Lars secretly giggles about Matt looking like he's doing McDonald's employee cosplay.

I'll be the first to admit that this sort of caper isn't quite my mug of Earl Grey. I often feel rather lost and frustrated with abstract arcade adventures like this. When playing it, it seems like there's always at least one too many obstacles to contend with. I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm currently on the look out for pokes, tips and maps to help me to explore more of its many technically stunning looking screens.

To construct something in BASIC that looks this good and plays this well is a colossal achievement. It deserves praise and should hopefully find its audience. Overall I'm in awe of the creator's programming chops, artwork and ability to successfully tell a fully fleshed out story.



Hewson, we have a problem.

Space Bros, eh? Sounds like a Super Mario clone in an other-worldly setting to me. Ah, I remember that, I mean Mario was okay, but I don't and didn't see what all the fuss was (and is) about. Anyway, let's get this one fired up.

Blummin' 'eck! This is BASIC? Are yer sure? Really? Oh, and it isn't a Mario clone either? And that intro though! Talk about going the extra K!

Blasting off to find your hapless sibling Lars, you take control initially of Matt. To aid you, an advanced AI, known as A.L.I.C.E is there to guide the ship, but on approaching a mysterious planet from which Lars has called for help, there is a hull breach resulting in a crash landing. This scatters four important items that will aid you in your quest around this strange world. So the first thing is to acclimatise to the locale and get your gear back.

Exploring this game world is a bit of a learning curve; I saw 'mission failed' too early and too often at first, but that's not a problem for a persistent gamer like me. I eventually got the hang of it (okay, I stopped being crap at it), and the whole world started to open up, with some excellent puzzles and great platforming.

What we have is a highly polished and extremely fun (fun fun!) explorer platform game with some snazzy RPG elements, using the tried and trusted Jet Set Willy flip screen thingy common on the Speccy. There are 48 screens to explore, and you not only need to find your sibling, but you must switch between the two characters too, working in a cooperative manner to solve puzzles - but to do this, you will need to find a communicator first (sorry for the spoiler). It's berrilliant, I say. Get it fired up and be the hero that you were born to be!

ANDREW RYALS'

HACK PACK

Andrew's been slaving away in the dungeon, interrogating helpless developers to give up their secrets, and passing the benefits on to you, you filthy cheats.

Hello and welcome to a new pokes column in a new mag! These pokes have been carefully curated since the begnning of 2025. My intentions are to try and help new speccy users get the most from the amazing amount of new games which appear to be released on a monthly basis and secondly to have a journey down the 1980's memory lane.
These pokes are designed to be entered in a real Spectrum via a hardware device like the DisCiple disk interface or the ever popular Multiface range of products from Romantic Robot. Alternatively many emulators now offer a poke option where the pokes can be entered directly into a snapshot.

Sometimes pokes don't work : authors may offer new versions of games, so don't be upset or angry if this is the case and your poke doesn't work. A good example is Herbie Wants to be a Millionaire where I have produced pokes for two versions of the game.

Basterdale Farm

31768,0	Infinite Lives
29985,x	x=lives
29980,x	x=farts

Bubble Cop

32028,x	x=lives
32038,x	x=ruby rings
32044,x	x=bubbles

Chump Town

38858,0	Infinite Lives
55089,x3	x=lives

Driar

27954,0	Infinite Lives
52604,x	x=lives
52603,x	x=level

Far West

38495,0	Infinite Lives
42811,0	Infinite Keys
24607,x	x=keys
24606,x	x=lives
24603,x	x=coins

Gorf

32784,x	x=lives

Bubble In Trouble

53091,x	x=time
36622,0	Infinite lives
53082,x	x=lives
53094,x	x=level

Charlie Far's Vimpto Quest / Steve's Quest for Coins

27564,0	Infinite Lives
43022,x	x=lives

Don Ninja

24613,x	x=Energy
24604.x	x=Diamonds
24614,x	x=keys

Fantastic Adventure

64139,x	x=lives

Footble Smellble

27375,0	Infinite Lives
36168,x	x=lives

Goblinarama

24610,x	x=energy

Lunar Patrol

32028,x	x=lives

Operation Moo

24610.x	x=energy

Herbie wants to be a Millionaire v1.0

33790,0	Infinite lives
57186,x	x=lives
31076,0	Infinite time
57195,x	x=time
57185,x	x=level

Mieyen

25199,0	Infinite lives
26960,x	Infinite burgers
34854,x	x=burgers
34852,x	x=lives

Poppy the Parrot

26825,0	Infinite Lives
38226,x	x=lives

SkillTeam

60990,x	x=level

Telethugs

26886,0	Infinite lives

They Killed My Little One

29383,x	x=lives
29384,x	x=ammo

Throbbin' Headache DX

30795,0	Infinite lives
46234,x	x=lives
46249,x	x=pills
46233,x	x=level

Ziona Quest II Part 1

32040,x	x=lives

La Manula 2

34671,x	Infinite Lives
24476,x	x=lives

Herbie wants to be a Millionaire v1.1

33864,0	Infinite lives
57905,x	x=lives
57904,x	Infinite time
31154,0	x=time
57914,x	x=level

Painterman

32570,0	Infinite lives
46471,x	x=lives
26798,0	Infinite paint spills
46478,x	x=paint spills

Rollerball

36557,x	x=lives
28277,0	Infinite lives
36577,x	x=time
27854,0	Infinite time

The Last Bullet

53767,x	x=lives
53759,x	x=bullets

SkillTeam

60990,x	x=level

Throbbin' Headache

27787,0	Infinite lives
38299,x	x=lives
38314,x	x=pills

Un Señor Con Sombrero

24603,x	x=Energy

Throbby Heartache

29794,0	Infinite lives
46251,x	x=lives
46266,x	x=pills
46250,x	x=level

Poppy Parrot

Crazy Duck Games

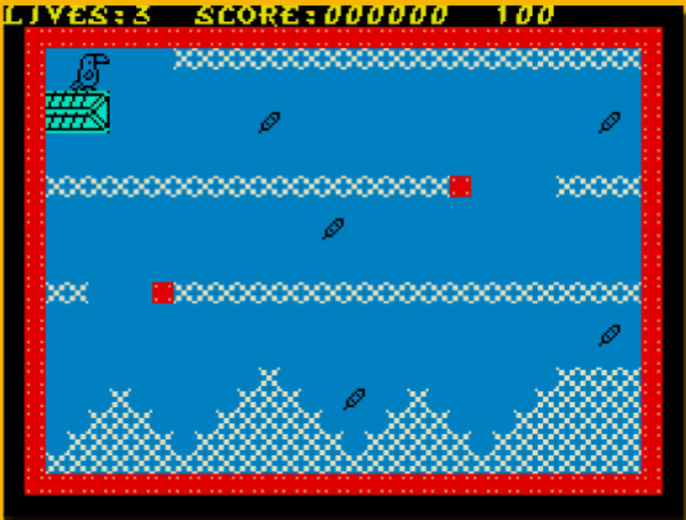
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44268

Free

Poppy the Parrot, by Crazy Duck games, is a simple, charming jetpack-controlled game where you navigate spike-filled levels collecting feathers. With numerous levels of varying difficulty, it offers gentle but enjoyable gameplay - though adults will find it very easy overall.

But forget parrots for a second, and let's address the elephant in the room: yes, it's a little janky. The collision detection on falling acid blobs is questionable, and some enemies can push you through walls (accidentally letting me skip sections entirely). Poppy parrot lacks mid-flight animation when hovering on the spot, which feels like a missed opportunity.

Difficulty-wise, the game is extremely forgiving. Three lives plus a 100-point health bar (refilled each level) meant I completed it on my first attempt without dying. My closest brush with death came when an enemy pinned me against spikes, dealing heavy damage before I escaped.



Flapping Hell

Enemies are basic MPAGD staples, graphics are functional (only Poppy and the acid animate), and sound effects are minimal beeps and bloops. Yet this simplicity works in its favor - the consistent visual style creates a childlike charm that's oddly endearing.

Don't dismiss Poppy just yet. Sometimes a game transcends the sum of it's parts, and this is one such case. Its refreshing simplicity makes it perfect for short play sessions or younger gamers. The heartwarming ending - where Poppy rescues another parrot (a friend? partner?) - delivers genuine warmth.

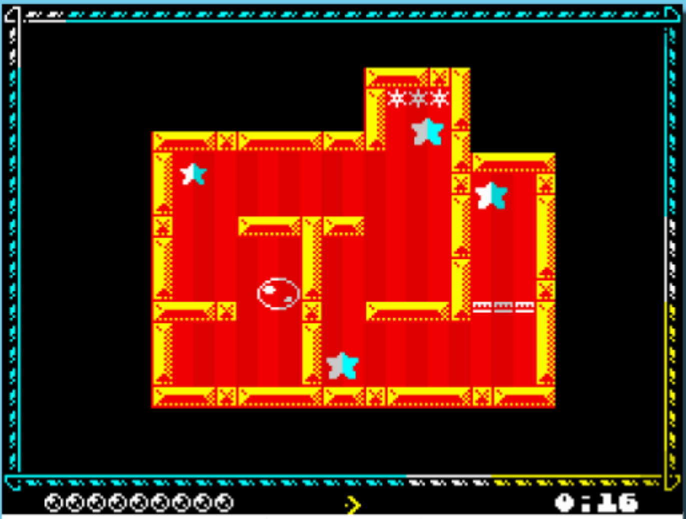
Verdict: Not innovative or challenging, but full of unpretentious fun. Like a children's storybook come to life on your Spectrum.

Bubble In Trouble

Bitmagine

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44268

PWYW / 43



Seeing red?

Apparently, Bobbly, a friendly bubble, has messed up again! And this time, he's lost the ancient stars that provide his village with endless soap.

The aim of the game is to help our friendly bubble pal to recover the lost stars. You'll have to face a multitude of dangers in 26 colorful rooms. This task is made harder by the fact our little hero is always moving. Also, you have to be quick, as the time limit is quite tight and I died a few times just because I was taking my sweet time.

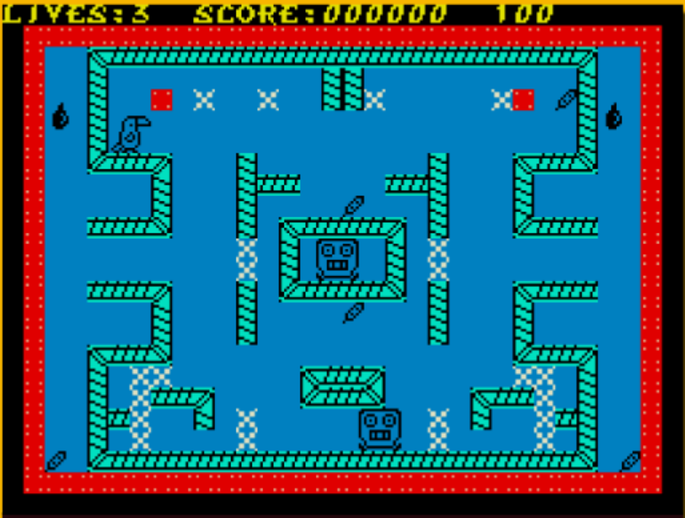
There are power ups that alter various mechanics of the game, for example, a star that makes you sink, and I discovered extra lives hidden in some rooms.

Graphically the game looks very good, with bright and dark paper colors used to good effect. The main character, being a bubble, is arguably fairly boring to look at, but the overall design of each level looks great and more than makes up for our hero being dull as dish water - which let's face it, he literally is!

The learning curve is way too gentle, and the game didn't really get interesting until level 10 or 11. The bubble moves quite slowly adding to my frustration with the ease of the early levels. On the other hand, there is a nice and highly polished AY tune that plays on a loop throughout the game.

While early levels left me underwhelmed, I think they would be great fun for children looking to get into the ZX Spectrum for the first time, and the final 16 levels do offer a good level of challenge and variety.

On the whole, Bubble in Trouble is a great, polished



I'm sure I've seen that somewhere before

It's nice to see an author take feedback on board. The original release of Poppy had an eye defying colour scheme, virtually no sounds and WASD keys (sound the klaxon). Three updates later, we have some rather fetching black sprites on cyan, beeper sound FX, and a redefine keys option. Also, Crazy Duck must be a mind reader, because since Jamie's review, extra sprite animations have been added!

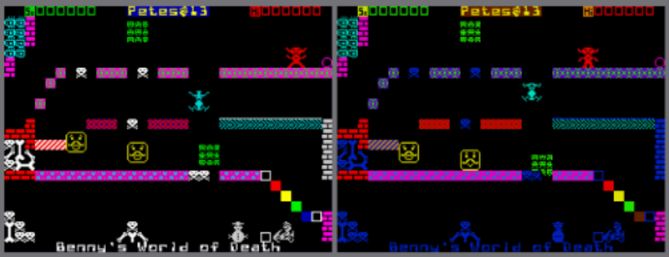
I do like it when a game uses PAPER colours. Most Spectrum games have black paper (citation needed) because it's more forgiving to do graphics on. For example there's no difference between BRIGHT and non-BRIGHT black, so you can more easily use shade. As a result, a game that embraces PAPER looks fresh and makes a nice change. And even more so here, because it's primarily intended to be played with a ULA+ palette, which on this occasion does add a natty touch to the proper Spectrum's cyan.

'Poppy' is a gentle stroll through some nice scenery with a happy ending. It builds on the previous game about potatoes, and above all demonstrates the author is very keen on alliteration and the letter 'P'. Start placing your bets on their next game—my money's on Percy Pangolin.

The MPAGD / ULA+ Problem

Nerd time! As mentioned in the issue 1 glossary, ULA+ is a hardware add-on for the Speccy that allows for over 200 colours on screen, versus the usual 15.

The MPAGD game engine switches this On by default, as do many emulators. This means that new developers, including our own Sloany*, can get caught out by games looking entirely different on emulators that support ULA+ and ones that don't (or real hardware). Caution is advised.



**Award Winning!*

MPAGD game with enough novel mechanics and polish to keep you interested. I just wish the early levels were a bit more taxing.

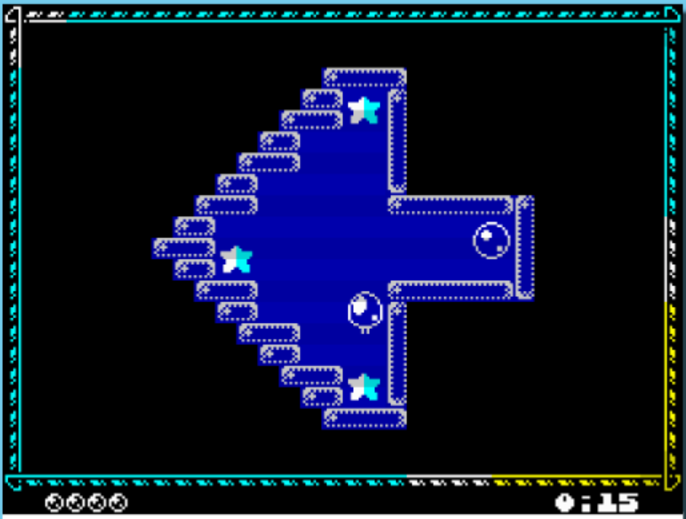
When I think of bubbles and the ZX Spectrum, it brings to mind two things.
(1) Bubblesort, the educational thing on the Horizons tape about sorting algorithms that utterly baffled me as a child as I tried for many weeks to "play" it; and
(2) Bubble Bobble, the greatest videogame of all time.

Falling somewhere between the two lies Bubble in Trouble, a rather funky little gem from the prolific Bitmagine Studio.

I had so much fun with this and unlike my colleague, things got "interesting" for me at level 6, when a combination of inertia and strict time limits had me rinsing through lives. However once I got used to the set up I started getting further and further into the game and uncovering its secrets. So for me the learning curve was absolutely spot on.

Bubble in Trouble is exactly my kind of thing. The graphics are tidy, the music is great and the game plays extremely well, with some interesting mechanics that differentiate it from similar single screen platformers.

There's a good few hours of fun and at 26 levels there's plenty to get your teeth into, especially when you reach the mid teens and start tearing your hair out in frustration at some of the fiendish levels. With patience and practice it is achievable though and doesn't outstay its welcome.



Float This Way…

So yeah if you're in for a bit of polished Speccy platforming fun with a slight puzzle element, then give this one a pop.

Just to note, if Sloanysoft release a game with a bubble theme later in the year, we've not copied this, we've had It in our "to do" pile for years
(A likely story - Ed)

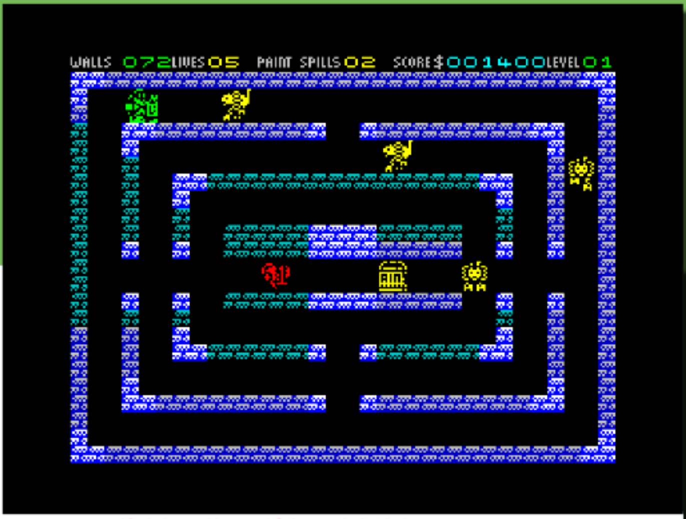
Painter Man

KTB Retro

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44267

PWYW / £2

When you survey the history of videogames, there is a line of painting games that runs through it as clearly as a fresh lick of "Dulux Vibrant Orange" on a magnolia wall. The golden age of the arcades treated us to the likes of Amidar and Q-Bert and that lineage can be traced right up to 2025's Spray Paint Simulator and the Speccy's own Bearded Fantasy, which was reviewed in our last issue.



I'd be lion if I said this was easy

Painter Man carries on this tradition by tasking you with spending your Bank Holiday giving your plush castle walls a new coat of paint. As if this wasn't enough of a chore to contend with, some angry AI lions have escaped from the local robot zoo and are making a right nuisance of themselves.

Painter Man follows another classic tradition of having a series of single screen mazes to play through. If you go blundering in, as I always tend to do, it is a very punishing experience. There seem to be far too many enemies to deal with and they are around every single corner, getting you trapped over and over again, causing you to turn the air as blue as the game's lovely menu screen.

Repeated play is rewarded, however. It might take a small handful of plays until you spot it, but if you look at the enemy patterns, you'll begin to anticipate their movement and take evasive action. The enemies wander around seemingly aimlessly but when they clock you, they turn red and start to home in on you. Thankfully, in your arsenal, you possess the ability to drop some paint to stop them in their tracks. Deployment of the paint as a defensive weapon takes a bit of getting used to, but once it clicks that it can be used as a barrier, it can really help you deal with being in a tight spot.

I enjoyed playing Painter Man a lot, especially when I got the hang of things and started getting through a few levels.

The whole package is rounded off with slick graphics and a jolly tune that helpfully becomes frantic when you run out of paint spills. There's a real sense of playfulness prevailing throughout the experience that makes it thoroughly enjoyable.

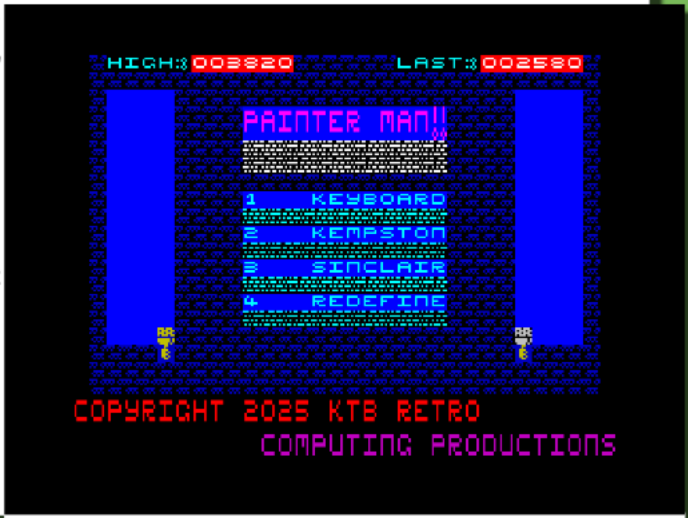
Painter man, who would be a Painter Man? Well me it would appear.

If you ask me, painting & bank holidays in real life are about as well matched as Jennifer Lopez & Wilfrid Bramble, but thankfully they make excellent bedfellows on the ZX-Spectrum. Same might go for J-Lo & Steptoe.

Scrrwm's style is particularly distinctive. In this case his excellent cartoony graphics set a sinister and suffocating maze, the creepiness bolstered by a player sprite that wouldn't be out of place in a slasher movie. Bonus points must be awarded for the superbly recognised 'extra life' beating heart icon, palpitating ever faster before it disappears.

Like Sloany & Al I found it hard, but 10 levels isn't many and it's probably within reach with practice. That takes a while though, and at the rate the pleasingly prolific KTB Productions is going, they'll have a couple of new games out before I even have the chance to 'git gud'. So the lamer in me would like an easy mode: perhaps with a paint top up every lost life, no deadly collision with a painted lion, and with fewer/slower lions.

And if a certain Boney M track gets stuck in your head, fear not, because the game's mad AY music is guaranteed to dislodge it!

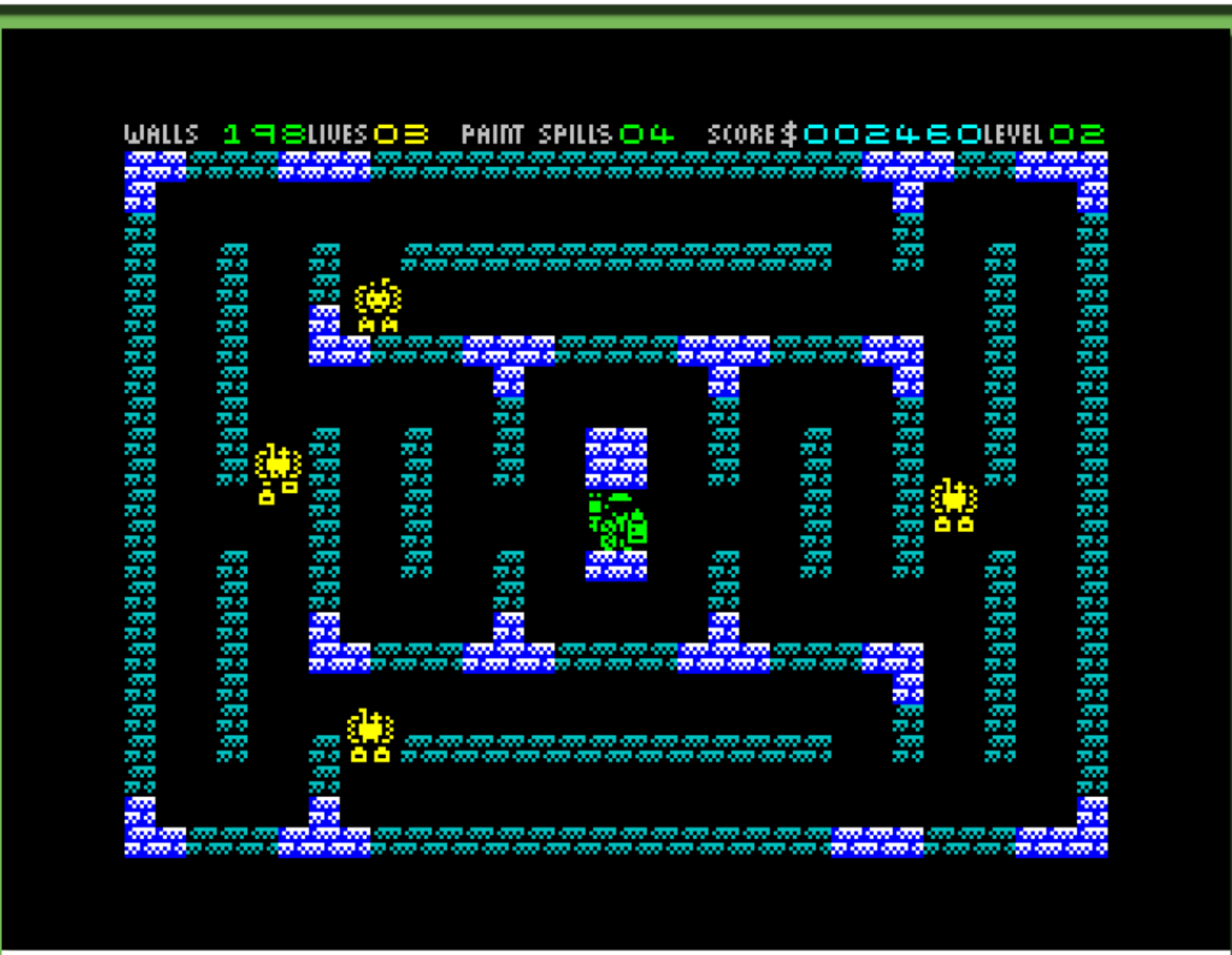


That beautiful blue title screen

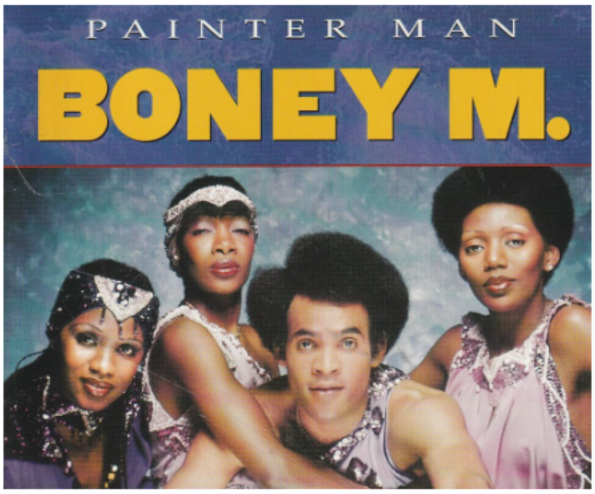
Oh yeah I know that tune - "the only one who could ever reach me... was the son of a painter man. Yes he was, he was. Oh yes he was." Ah great times, playing old Spectrum games with Dusty Springfield, then going dancing with Uma Thurman and later getting shot and killed on the john when a toaster popped unexpectedly. Or was that just a dream I had.

Anyway Mr. Painterman (shabba) reminds me a lot of ancient Speccy classic Spectres by Bug-Byte. And when I say classic I mean it was alright for the time. In that one you had to illuminate the maze with light bulbs (sounds expensive) while here you must painta da maze, which sounds like DIY hell to me, and something I definitely won't be wasting a bank holiday doing. Sorry.

Despite my aversion to hard work, the game is a neat twist on the Pacman genre, has a nice tune and cute graphics, and is impossibly hard. Sometimes I wonder if I'm any good at any games, as the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of me being crap in spite of decades of practice. Maybe a 'kids' setting a la Leaderboard would give me half a chance of seeing level 3?



You missed a bit



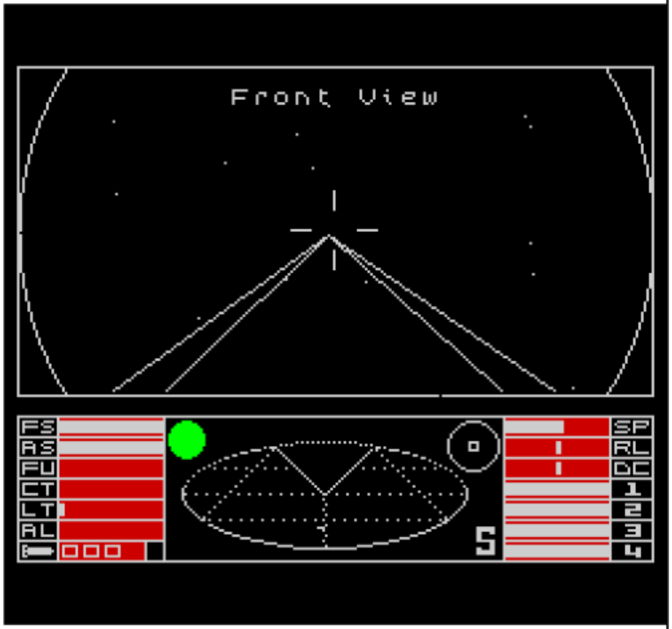
Look, we don't know for sure that KTB was inspired to make this game by the Boney M. song of the same name.
But let's assume it was.
Then, we can do a bit talking about other Boney M. inspired games. Most obvious is Firebird's 1987 Rasputin, surely inspired by BM's world-wide hit.
And there are 11 Speccy releases named 'Calendar', surely after the album track of the same name. Bit of a stretch this one, lads.

HOT
RASPUTIN

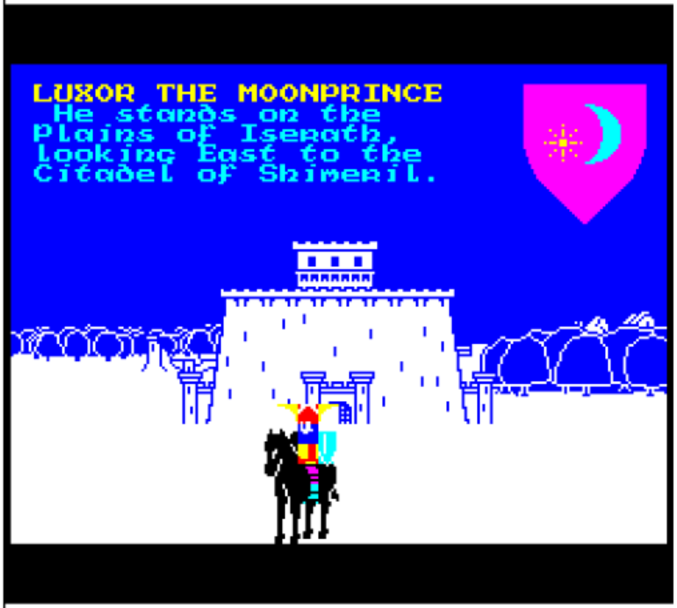
From Speccy to Tabletop - The legacy of 8-bit Worlds

In the 80s there were plenty of early videogames based upon already established fictional worlds. The ability to explore the Middle Earth you knew in playing *The Hobbit*, or sneak around the Nostromo in *Alien*, or relax into the surreal suburbia of *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*… these were a great motivator of sales. At their best these games felt like they built upon the universe you knew from the novel, film, or album – at their worst, they felt like a cheap cash-in.

However, rarely did we see the translation the other way - from 8-bit world building to other media. Sure, there were the odd songs that filled the B-side of a game cassette, a handful of sequels, or oddities like the *Pac-Man* cartoon series (1982/83), but no one was rushing to novelise *Skool Daze* or adapt *Horace Goes Skiing* into a prestige drama*. This idea didn't catch on until much later. Even *Super Mario Bros.* took until 1993 to make it to film – and we know how that turned out. Certainly the ZX Spectrum felt far too niche a starting point to break out into a mainstream media franchise.



One notable exception to this is *Elite* – a franchise that launched on the BBC Micro in 1984 (and later that same year on the Spectrum). This came with its own novella, The Dark Wheel, written by Robert Holdstock ~20,000 words of hard sci-fi establishing the game's world. Elite had numerous spin-offs and sequels that expanded the universe far beyond its wireframe roots, and Sci-fi author Drew Wagar was tasked with writing official novels in the Elite universe (*Elite Reclamation* in 2015 and *Elite Dangerous: Premonition* in 2017). Finally a full tabletop roleplaying game (*Elite: Dangerous RPG)* was successfully Kickstarted in 2017.

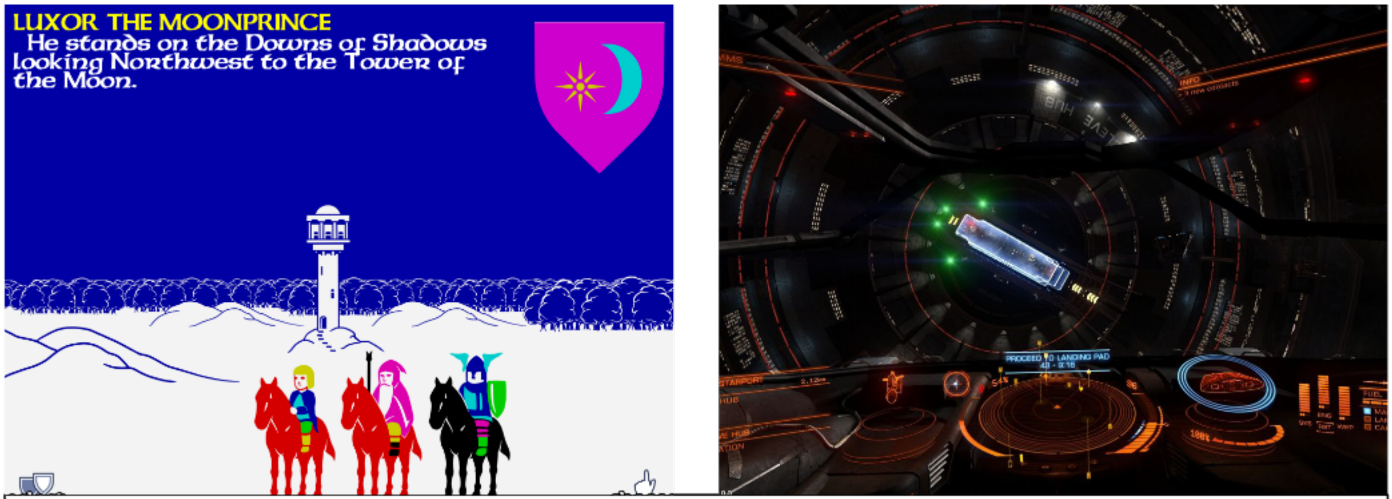


LUXOR THE MOONPRINCE
He stands on the
Plains of Iserath,
looking East to the
Citadel of Shimeril.

It's interesting to draw parallels with the Speccy original game from 1984 – Beyond Software's *The Lords of Midnight* (and its equally lauded sequel *Doomdark's Revenge*). Both games were the creation of Mike Singleton and clearly inspired by Tolkien, with epic fantasy warfare and a strong narrative backbone. Singleton even wrote a five-chapter novella, The War of the Solstice, to accompany the first game, and another similar sized piece of world building for the second game. Both Elite and Lords of Midnight used prose fiction not just as flavour, but as part of the game's mythology.

Whilst Elite had many reboots and continuations on later platforms, The Lords Of Midnight only really had *LOM: Citadel* on PC in 1995.

But fast forward a couple of decades: although Mike Singleton has sadly passed, his stories and worlds live on. Through the faithful remakes made by Chris Wild, there are painstakingly recreated PC, OSX, Android and IOS versions. These mean it's possible to return to land of Midnight and explore these games on later platforms. Later on Drew Wagar (him again!) was brought in to write the official novel of *The Lords of Midnight* in 2018. His works aren't just fan tributes, but officially sanctioned extensions of their respective *Elite* and *Midnight* worlds, and have been well received.



LUXOR THE MOONPRINCE
He stands on the Downs of Shadows looking Northwest to the Tower of the Moon.

PROCEED TO LANDING PAD
STARPORT

Lords Of Midnight and Elite Dangerous: Some PC remakes are more recognisable than others

And now – in 2025 – there is *Morkin* - a lovingly crafted solo RPG rooted firmly in the world of *The Lords of Midnight* has come to fruition via a successfully crowdfunded route with over 600 backers pre-ordering. Created by Juan Díaz-Bustamante, this is part solo-journaling RPG, part gamebook, part stats-tracking, part dice-rolling and skillstesting … and very much all *Midnight*. It’s glorious to see here – not just fanfiction or spiritual successor, but licensed and endorsed by Mike Singleton’s family.

Perhaps there may be an appetite to return to other universes that started life in the 8-bit era. Of course a ZX Spectrum reference still occasionally sneaks into modern media – a drama’s character reminiscing about the Speccy loading sounds, or similar – and you’ll know the author is one of ‘us’. But it’ll be those obvious touchstones: *Manic Miner*, *Jetpac*, or the 48k rubber keyboard. Perhaps we can move into less cliched references and finally get that *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky* tabletop RPG I’ve been craving. Maybe *Morkin* is paving the way.

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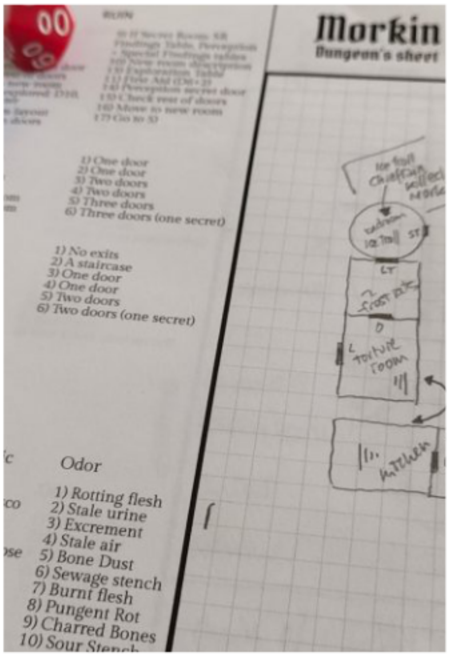
*more’s the pity. I’d have cast Terence Stamp as a brooding Horace.

In the tabletop/book RPG Morkin, you’ll create attributes for your hero (the titular Morkin) and journey across the land of Midnight having encounters, journaling what happens, and probably failing to defeat Doomdark within the allotted 30 days. As a hex based solo RPG some of the encounters are predetermined, but others are determined by dice rolls and look up tables. https://morkin-game.com/

Morkin
Skills
Animal Handling (CHA)
Athletics (DEX)
Camp (DEX/2+INT/2)
Defence (STR/2+DEX/2)
Disarm Traps (DEX/2+INT/2)
Endurance (STR)
First Aid (INT)
Fishing (DEX)
Foraging (DEX/2+INT/2)
Hunting (STR/2+DEX/2)
Lock Picking (DEX/2+INT/2)
Might (STR)
Melee (STR)
Experience points (XP)



Morkin
Dungeon's sheet
1) One door
2) One door
3) Two doors
4) Two doors
5) Three doors
6) Three doors (one secret)
1) No exits
2) A staircase
3) One door
4) One door
5) Two doors
6) Two doors (one secret)
Odor
1) Rotting flesh
2) Stale urine
3) Excrement
4) Stale air
5) Bone Dust
6) Sewage stench
7) Burnt flesh
8) Pungent Rot
9) Charred Bones
10) Sour Stench
torture room
kitchen

The Elite: Dangerous RPG in contrast is a more traditional group-based RPG, presenting rules and environment for a GM to guide their players through adventures across the innumberable worlds of the Elite galaxy.

MORKIN

A The Lords of Midnight Solo Adventure Game

Juan Díaz-Bustamante kindly spent some time chatting with us about Morkin, and what it meant to him to be revisiting a bona fide ZX Spectrum classic in a different medium.

DESIGN & INSPIRATION

What was your first experience with The Lords of Midnight on the ZX Spectrum, and what impact did it have on you?

I first played The Lords of Midnight when it was released for the ZX Spectrum, and it immediately became my favourite game. And it still is today, alongside three or four others.

What made you decide that Morkin's story was the right entry point for a tabletop adaptation?

A couple of years ago, I discovered solo role-playing games as well as single-player dungeon crawlers, and I immediately thought that Morkin's adventure could be adapted into that format.

How did you approach adapting an open-ended, strategy-heavy video game into a solo narrative RPG experience?

Of course, I had to considerably expand the world that Morkin was facing: events, side quests, more enemies... Chris Wild was a huge help in that regard. He's the person who manages the rights to The Lords of Midnight as a representative of Mike Singleton's family, as well as the developer of the modern adaptations of the original video game.

Were there any mechanics or moments from the original game that were particularly tricky (or exciting) to translate to the tabletop?

Perhaps the biggest challenge was what to do with the armies, both allied and Doomdark's. I chose to transform the armies into individual NPCs. That meant recruiting companions to help you individually on your adventure.

The original had a strong dual gameplay approach (war and quest). Did you focus more on one over the other?
Yes, I focused solely on Morkin's personal quest, due to the nature of the game. I'd love to bring the dual experience into a physical format, but I think that would require more of a board game.

ZX SPECTRUM LEGACY

So, what does the ZX Spectrum mean to you?

The ZX Spectrum was my first computer, so you can imagine what it meant to me… I had over a hundred games and even learned to program in BASIC.

How important was it for Morkin to retain the feel of the original?

Very important. That's why the core of the game is present in mine, including enemies, Lords, and items you can find. And of course, the map and the final quest.

Did you consciously design Morkin to feel like something from a 1980s covermount or fanzine?
Yes, although it's 290 pages long... I don't know if that would have been too thick for a covermount!

COMMUNITY & PRODUCTION

What kind of feedback have you had from long-time Lords of Midnight fans?
Very positive. I believe they make up a significant portion of the Kickstarter backers. It'll be interesting to see how they face a game of this kind for the first time, driven by their memories.

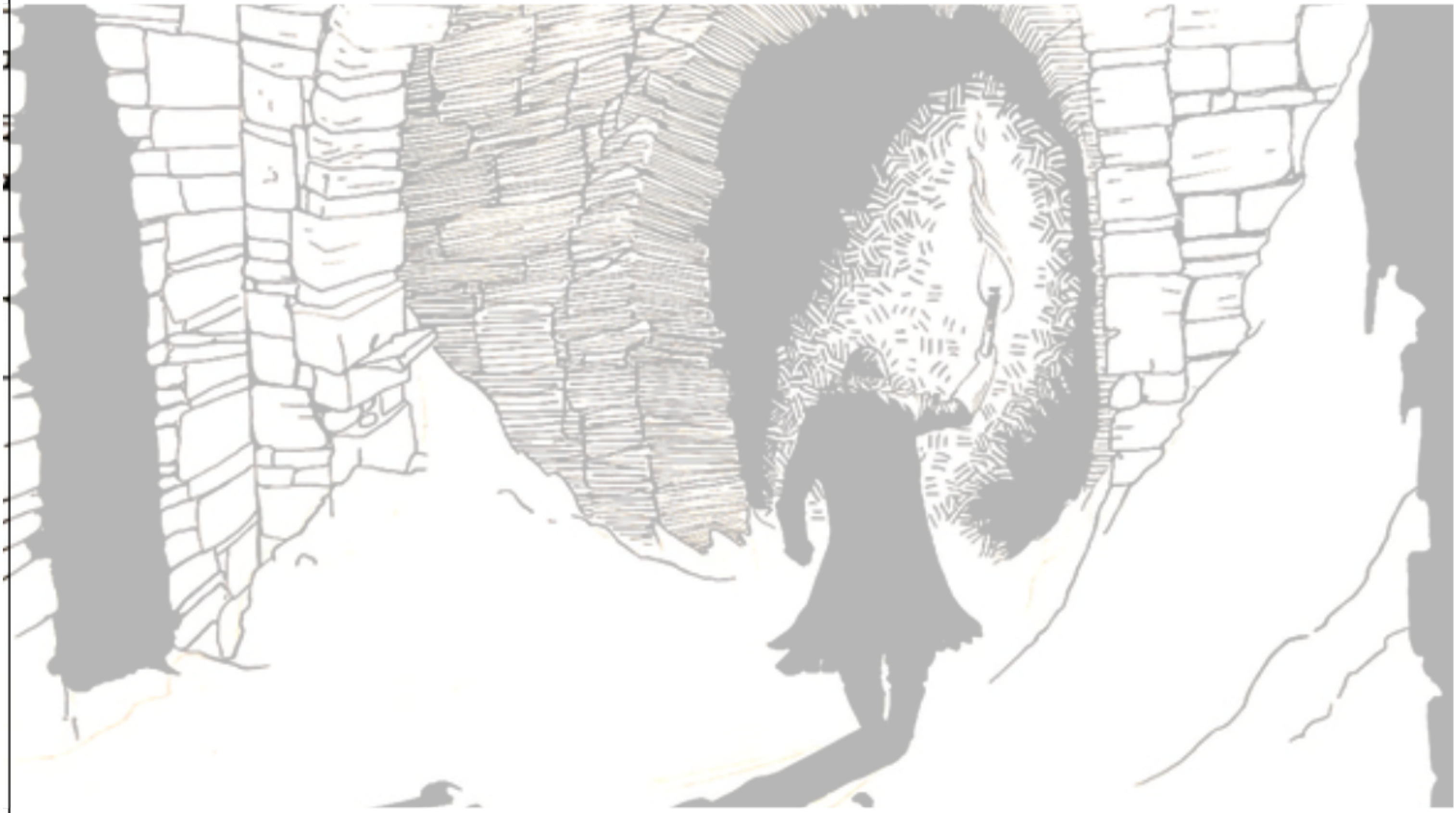
Was this a passion project or something you always intended for Kickstarter?
As soon as the idea came up, I felt an unstoppable motivation, especially after getting approval from Chris Wild and Mike Singleton's family. Even then, I knew I would go through Kickstarter.

Was it difficult to obtain the licence?
No, although it did take a few months. Chris was very open to the idea from the beginning, for which I'll always be grateful.

THEMES & FUTURE

Are there plans to expand Morkin?
Right now, I'm focused on finishing the game—I also have a regular job! But yes, I'm thinking about my next game, and I want to see how players react first.

Is Morkin a love letter, a reimagining, or a continuation?



A love letter. Adapted to this kind of game, but keeping the essence of the original intact.

Any other Spectrum titles you'd love to adapt to TTRPG format?
I always really liked Avalon, and its sequel Dragontorc. And of course, Doomdark's Revenge.

If you could speak directly to a Spectrum user from 1985, how would you pitch Morkin?
It would be tricky - I'm not sure if these types of games even existed back then - but I suppose I'd tell people to read the book and learn how to play it while they waited for the game to load from the cassette tape. Hehe.

Thanks Juan!
The successful Morkin Kickstarter campaign recently ended, but copies will be available very soon on drivethrurpg.com and Amazon

Rush

JBizzel

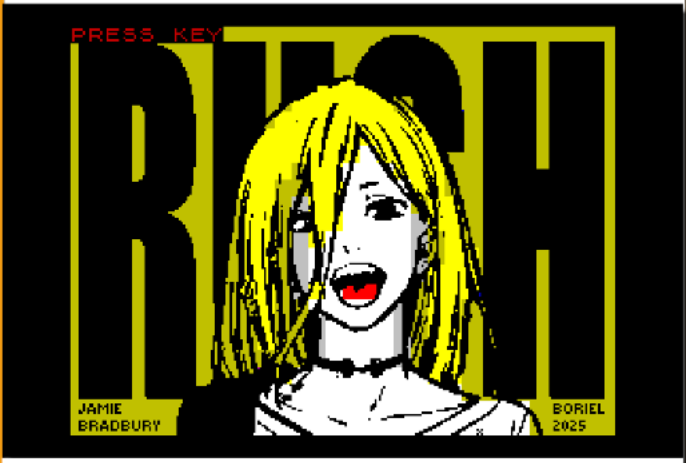
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44272

PWYW / £2

When rosy-fingered dawn awoke and enveloped the BreakSpace office in sunlight the other day, not a reviewer was stirring. A few too many the night before at the Disbelieved Dragon down the high street made for a sorry morning scene of sozzled Spectrumers. All was still. Suddenly a strident alarm split the air, accompanied by the dulcet shrieking of our receptionist Janine. "WE'VE GOT ONE!" Sounded like a new Speccy title was out!

So - action stations! The Ed. barked out the orders, "Al, you've got Rush" and that was all the instruction I needed. I flew out the door in hot pursuit of my nearest John Menzies. I had to buy a copy of this rad new game before it sold out in the local compy shop. I'm sure I heard the Ed. shouting something faintly in the distance, along the lines of "You don't need to mff mff mff". He really shouldn't eat marshmallows for breakfast.

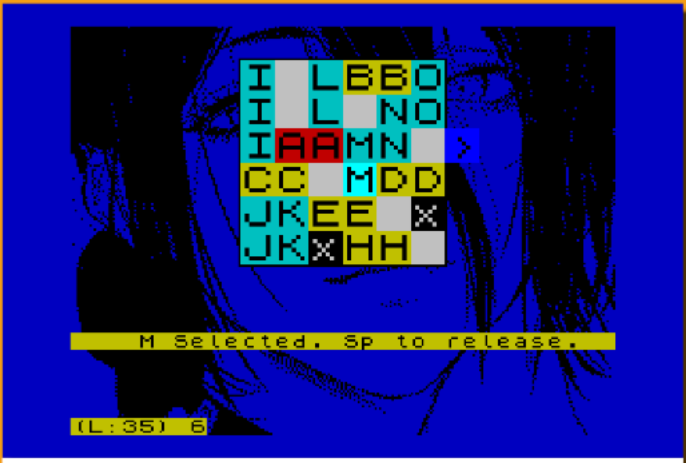
A few hours of fruitless street wandering later, and many conversations with confused, then irritated, then murderous, shop assistants, I realised the folly of my ways. For this shiny new game was written by none other than J "Lethal" Bizzel, a BreakSpace colleague. And he was happy to give me a review copy gratis. Hmm, on reflection maybe my earlier behaviour was a tad rash. But new games are exciting aren't they?



Get out of the way, we can't read the title.

The game's title might have subliminally encouraged me to engage 'headless chicken' mode, so I blame that. Having done some research at the library, I have found that this is a version of the board game Rush Hour, later turned into a buddy cop movie in a very loose interpretation.

Essentially, it's a block puzzle game where some alphabetical tiles move up and-a down, while some move left and-a right, and the aim is to somehow escape this hellish bottlenecking.



M Selected. Sp to release.

(L:35) 6

This crossword is terrible.

The ironic thing is that Rushing is not necessary even slightly in this game. There's no time limit, so take it easy. If you stuff up, you can reset or even skip the level entirely, if you're into dangerous downward spirals. You can also change the colours so that magenta is properly represented. There are 45 levels, of which I got past.. well, a semi-respectable number before things got claustrophobically tricky. There's a tune at the start and pictures of anime girls, none of which are inappropriate, unusually. On the whole an unRushed and enjoyable time was had.

One of the lovely things that's happened since I started writing reviews for Break Space is that I have played more new ZX Spectrum games this year than any year since the 1980s.

On this voyage of Speccy discovery a realisation has dawned, that realisation is that I have a real penchant for puzzle games. I thoroughly enjoyed the likes of SkillTeam and Master Piece in the last issue and now I have in front of me an unassuming little puzzler by the name of Rush.

Based on Nob Yoshigahara's board game "Rush Hour", Rush is the perfect example of a game that I might not necessarily have had a go at if it wasn't for playing it for a Break Space review, but I'm utterly delighted that I did.

At first glance it's a confusing grid of letters and colours, however the rules are actually pretty simple. Move the blocks around to get the red A blocks to the arrow block.

The game eases you in nicely with a few straightforward puzzles and once you get your noggin around the concept, the difficulty level starts creeping up which really keeps the interest going.

I ended up playing this one for hours, there's a real satisfaction to completing a level, it very much has that all important "one more go" factor.

The great thing about these type of games, is that because there's no time constraints or pixel perfect precision needed they're suitable to be played on any device you can emulate a Speccy on, even those new fangled touch screens that you may using to read this very mag. If that's the case for you, then you can treat yourself right now to a bit of cerebral fun by downloading it & giving it a go, even if you're sat sunning yourself on a beach in Skegness.

The Dark And Mysterious Labyrinth

Ambent Coder

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44277

Free

Let's have a look at that title, shall we?

Labyrinth : Yes, sure. This takes place in a multi-screen maze which scrolls smoothly around while your character stays in the middle.

Mysterious : Yes, absolutely fair. Why is the labyrinth here? Why is your character, a black-and-white-suited harlequin with a golden face, stalking about in there? Why are there fissures in space-time that must be blocked with golden blocks? What's with the green monsters, surely gelatinous cubes? Why are you wielding a turnip?

Dark : No. I'm not having that. Never before has a labyrinth been so brightly decorated, with red and purple tiles, royal blue walls and throbbing technicolour voids. It looks more like a childrens' soft play area than a creepy dungeon.

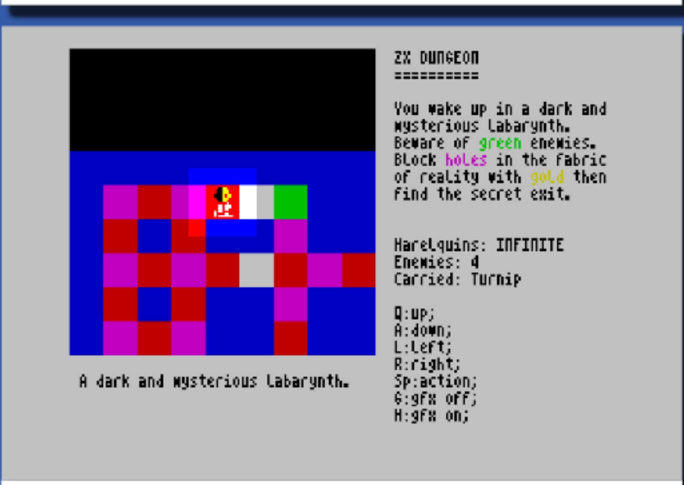
(For completeness, both 'The' and 'and' are functioning as expected in the title.)

So, with distrust immediately established, what's going on here? It took me a few rapid deaths to attune to the glare and figure those basics out. It's a simplistic, but in no way easy, block-pushing puzzle game. There are flashing tiles which you must cover up with golden blocks by shoving them into place. There are also monsters (the green squares) which track your every move and will kill you dead if they catch you, which resets everything.

Thankfully, you get to control the monsters by kiting them through the maze : it wouldn't do to be outsmarted by a blob of jelly after all. But if you're anything like me, you'll outsmart yourself a bunch of times. The trick is frequently to *almost* get eaten, dragging the blighters away from where you want to be then running away around a corner. No-one ever said the Harlequin was brave.

Built as a tech demo, to get a scrolling engine working, it is a little limited by the small play window, and block-by-block movement. But it looks great in its own way, and could be fleshed out into a satisfying game with a few more levels, some animation, a bit more audio.

As it stands it provides a pleasantly frustrating hour or so, and maybe that's enough to be going on with.



```
A dark and mysterious Labarynth.

ZX DUNGEON
==========

You wake up in a dark and
mysterious Labarynth.
Beware of green enemies.
Block holes in the fabric
of reality with gold then
find the secret exit.

Harelquins: INFINITE
Enemies: 4
Carried: Turnip

Q:up;
A:down;
L:Left;
R:right;
Sp:action;
G:gfx off;
H:gfx on;
```

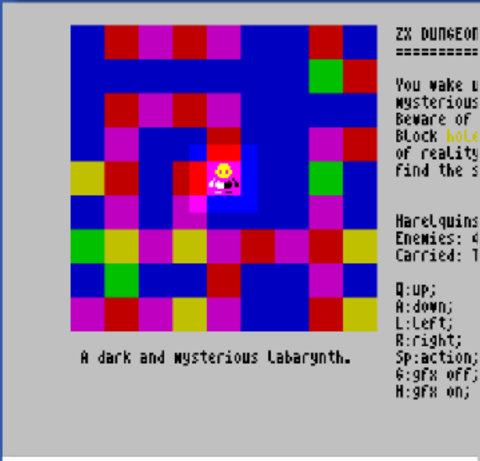
Face to face with the beast

Dark and mysterious? Not remotely dark, but certainly mysterious! I must admit, I had no idea what was happening when I first tried to play this. I wasn't even sure it was a game. My confusion wasn't helped by the bare-bones presentation: the game starts immediately upon loading, kills you within half a second if you don't know what you're doing (Which I clearly didn't), and there's even an inexplicable mode that turns the graphics off entirely. Why does this option exist? No one knows. It just renders the game unplayable.

Slowly (mainly because Mpk is a pushy slave driver), I made progress. First, I realized how to avoid insta-death. Slowly, I discovered I could run away from the green squares. Eventually, I figured out I could push the yellow squares. Finally, everything clicked: not only was this playable, it was fascinating.

The game does some very clever things with color management, and it runs remarkably smoothly—is it 50fps? I'm not sure, but it feels buttery. This feels less like a traditional game and more like a tech demo showcasing some brilliant programming. Perhaps that was the goal all along, prioritizing ingenuity over the spit-and-polish of conventional game design.

In the end, I enjoyed my time with it, but only after putting in the work to unravel its mysteries. It's well worth a look, if only to marvel at the engine for five minutes. And hopefully, this review will help shine a light into the game's dark and enigmatic depths!



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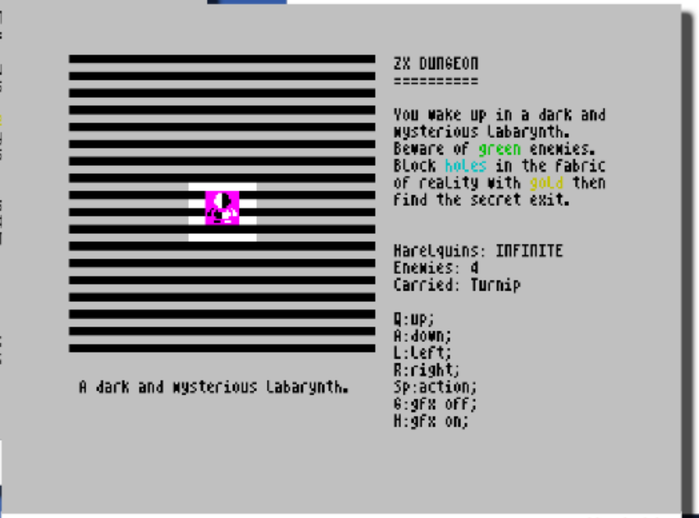
R:right;
Sp:action;
G:gfx off;
H:gfx on;
```

That's not how you spell that.



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Harelquins: INFINITE
Enemies: 4
Carried: Turnip

Q:up;
A:down;
L:Left;
R:right;
Sp:action;
G:gfx off;
H:gfx on;
```

Here it is with the, uh, graphics turned off. (!?)

Herbie Wants to be a Millionaire

Bitmagine

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44278

PWYW / $3

When I think of Herbie, I am reminded instantly of the world's first self-driving car with super advanced AI.

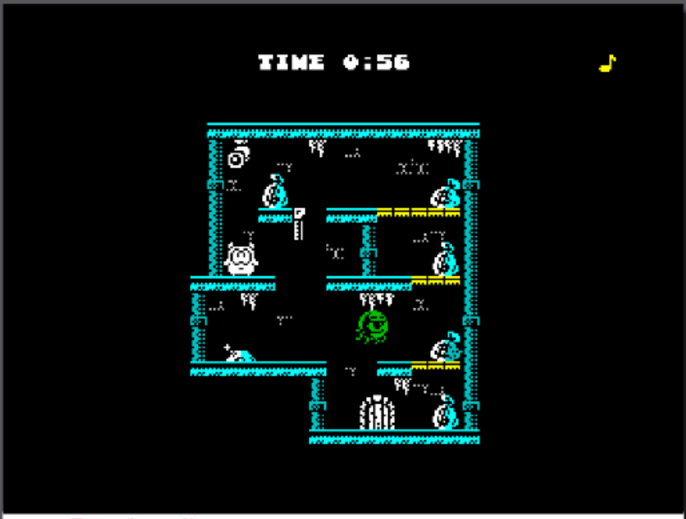
But in this case, we are dealing with a rather cute platform game which is reminiscent of the 2009 Spanish release Uwol, Quest for Money, released by Ubhres Productions and ported to other 8-bit home computers like the monochrome ZX81. But what's this particular production all about then?

Well, it's about a televised game show. Now, TV shows in ZX Spectrum land are few and far between. Of course, we had Ocean Software's rather punishing Smash TV, and in more recent times, Cronosoft's excellent Loco Bingo. Another release from the same publisher and developer, Tele Heroes, is a game kind of like Codemasters' Rock Star Ate My Hamster, which isn't a pick up and play, so I won't mention it in this review. Anyway, let's get on with it.

Now, live on channel ZX is a new televisual programme called "Risky Money" - proper prime time Friday Night watching! Herbie, facing poverty, is going to star in it, and you're there to guide him to grab as much Dosh as possible!

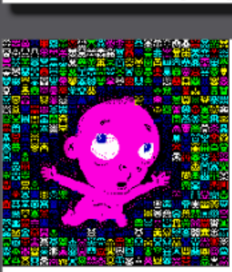
This is an excellently presented game for the big boy 128K Speccys, and is a fluid and simple platform affair; the AY music is very pleasing to my aging ears, and it's all rather cute, with a really nice learning curve. Controls are as simple as possible. Left, right, and jump/action, and of course, there are a plethora of this sort of thing on the old Speccy.

I gotta say, I really really like this game. Like really. The graphics are cute and the colour attribute limitations of the host hardware are handled really well. The music jovial, and the animation of the sprites are excellent. Hazards like ceiling spikes and floaty Aliens inspired by The Simpsons are introduced early on, and each level is played to a time limit with nicely increasing difficulty. I appreciate the niceties like the death animation, and having seven lives to start with is quite generous.



Don't roll your eyes at me, young man.

This is pure, simple arcade action with some puzzly type elements that are introduced as you progress (nowt too cerebral though). The execution is slick, and the whole package is a real bargain. Whilst I don't think this quite cuts it as an "Ace" in my view, it's as close to it as possible, definitely a very solid release. Go entertain yourself by getting this game. The only thing you'll regret is that you won't be a Millionaire by the time you're finished. At least not from playing it.

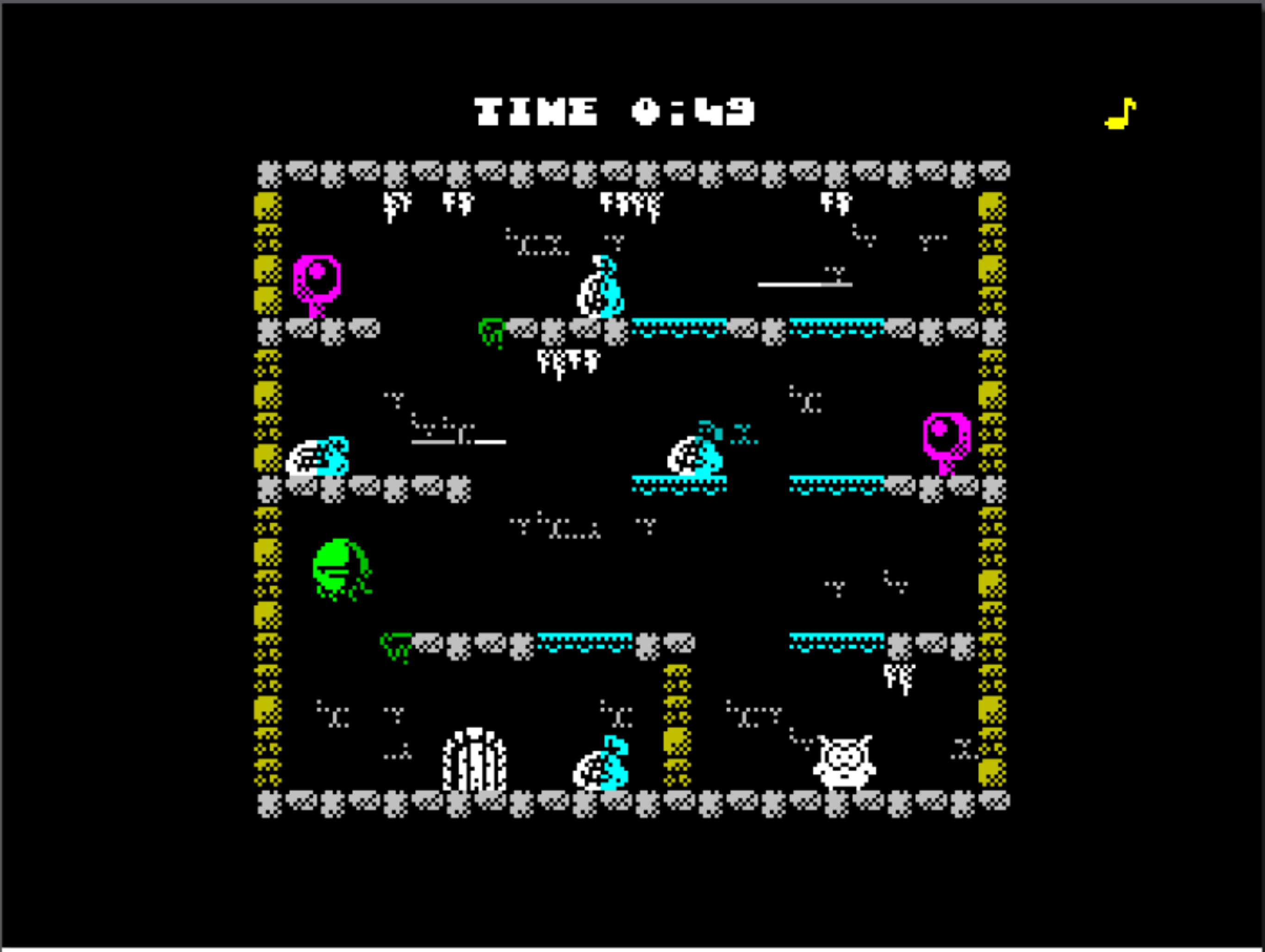


This cute & bouncy arcade/platform game looks amazing, is great fun to play, and has a modern 'indy' feel about it. You play Herbie, a contestant on a deadly TV gameshow. Basically like The Running Man but a million times cuter, and with less booting guard dogs in the head.

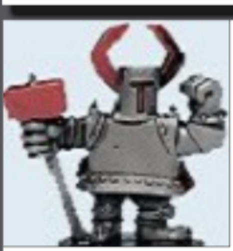
In my encomium of Driar in this very issue, I drone on about how well the graphics compare to the NES game it was ported from. Herbie is equally easy on the eye, but it also demonstrates that Jose Doorstein can come up with novel concepts and levels of his own. 25 levels to be precise, mostly small, mostly well-crafted.

You can only jump vertically (spinning beautifully while doing so), making it different to your typical platformer. Here it's more about planning your route then executing it within the 1 minute time limit, which is usually generous—most of the televised deaths will be from baddies, spikes or lasers.

It's worth remembering that rendering up to 12 animated, coloured, flicker-free sprites at a decent frame rate is not trivial to do, and MP/AGD does it for free. If you put that gift in the hands of an outstanding creative like Doorstein, you get outstanding games like Herbie Wants To Be A Millionaire.



Purple magnifying glasses? Dyson fans? No - Laser guns. Pew pew pew.

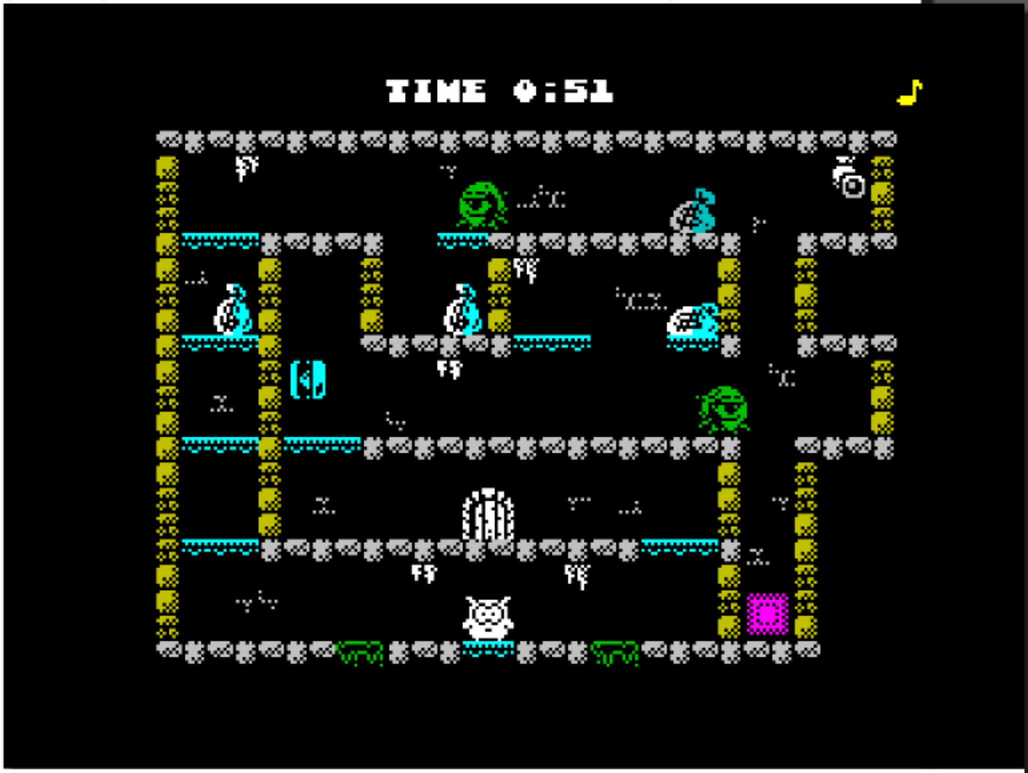


What is Herbie, do we think? An owl? I think he's an owl. An owl that can't fly properly, but that's down to his terrible TV-Addict lifestyle rather than anything genetic, I'm sure. And now he gets to go on a death-defying spiky TV gameshow, where somehow contestants get impaled and otherwise murdered on-screen. Still less offensive than The Wheel, somehow.

Anyway, for all the grim Running Man / Long Walk grimness of the premise, this remains entirely chirpy and cheerful. It's slick, smooth, looks great and handles precisely. The puzzles are not especially taxing, but not trivial either, and it's essentially a relaxing cruise with occasional bouts of mild frustration.

The levels feel tight, with a lot of repeating paths as you circulate around to grab the money bags, and often repeat a route to get the key that appears once you have all the bags. There are a few points where a teleporter will zap you to your death - without any way to know where they lead until you use them. This leads to some trial-and-error that leeches your lives away, which is a bit of a downer.

Not quite a classic then, but a sound 25 levels of classy platforming.



The time limit's gonna get you on this one.

Upgrade Snake

Zarsoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44313

Free

This was pitched to me as a Snake Management game, which gave me visions of a sort of Football Manager but Snakes, the cover art featuring an Anaconda draped strategically around a naked Kevin Toms.

But this is not that.

What it is though, is something even cleverer. And you know what? You should go check it out now before I explain what's going on. I did a jolly little clap when I started playing , so pleased was I with the whole concept. I don't think it's 100% original, but I've not played anything like it, and certainly not on the Spectrum. Off you go.

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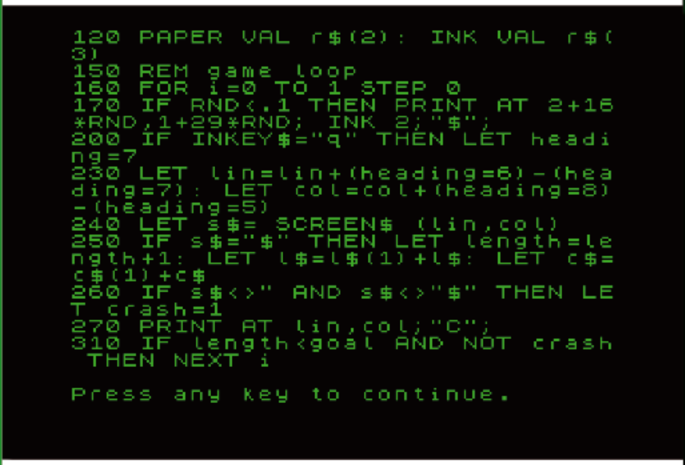
They're not coming back, are they? They don't need me to explain it after they've gone and played it themselves. Bugger. Just you left - the ones who didn't take my advice. Not sure how I feel about you lot. Anyway, let me explain.



```
120 PAPER VAL r$(2): INK VAL r$(
3)
150 REM game loop
160 FOR i=0 TO 1 STEP 0
170 IF RND<.1 THEN PRINT AT 2+16
*RND,1+29*RND; INK 2;"$";
200 IF INKEY$="q" THEN LET headi
ng=7
230 LET lin=lin+(heading=6)-(hea
ding=7): LET col=col+(heading=8)
-(heading=5)
240 LET s$= SCREEN$ (lin,col)
250 IF s$="$" THEN LET length=le
ngth+1: LET l$=l$(1)+l$: LET c$=
c$(1)+c$
260 IF s$<>" AND s$<>"$" THEN LE
T crash=1
270 PRINT AT lin,col;"C";
310 IF length<goal AND NOT crash
 THEN NEXT i

Press any key to continue.
```

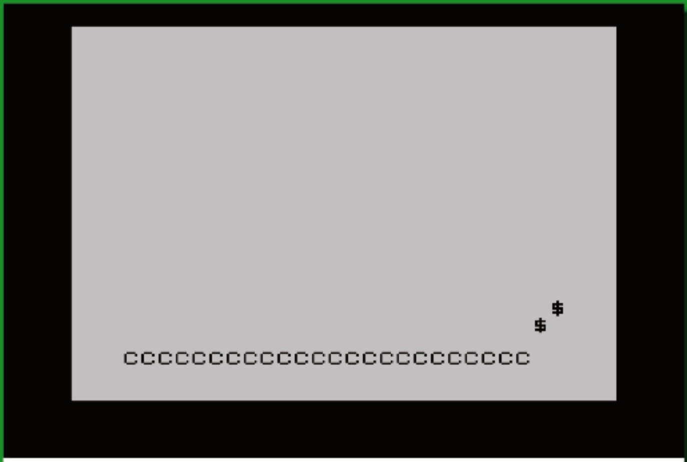
Phwoar!

So, to start off with, the game presents you with a BASIC listing, which you can, using the in-game menu system, LIST or RUN.

When you do run it, you'll see that the BASIC defines a rudimentary Snake game with letters for graphics, but you've only got one button - Q, to go up. No other directions. But if you eat one of the $ signs, you get the chance to buy another line of BASIC, which enables another button / feature.

And off you go, repeatedly playing Snake and enhancing the code as you progress, ending up with a fully featured Snake game, with graphics and audio and everything.

It's all very clever indeed.



Humble beginnings

But it's just Snake, in the end, and a (compiled) BASIC one at that. It would be nothing to write home about as a game in itself, but the presentation and the value as a learn-to-code demo is just fantastic. And if you don't want to learn to code, but would like to pretend that you do, then even better.

Laudable work. Although I'm still in the market for a Snake Manager game, if anyone's taking requests.

This is Snake—but not as you know it. You start with a severely limited version where only one of the four directional keys actually works. Yet somehow, after several attempts, I managed to score a point. My reward? A menu of dubious upgrades: an extra functional key... or the word "SNAKE" displayed at the top. Tough choices.

As you progress, the game evolves from a barely functional Snake clone into a... slightly less barebones version. Yes, that's exactly as absurd as it sounds. The clever bit? It edits its own BASIC listing live, adding new lines of code with each upgrade.

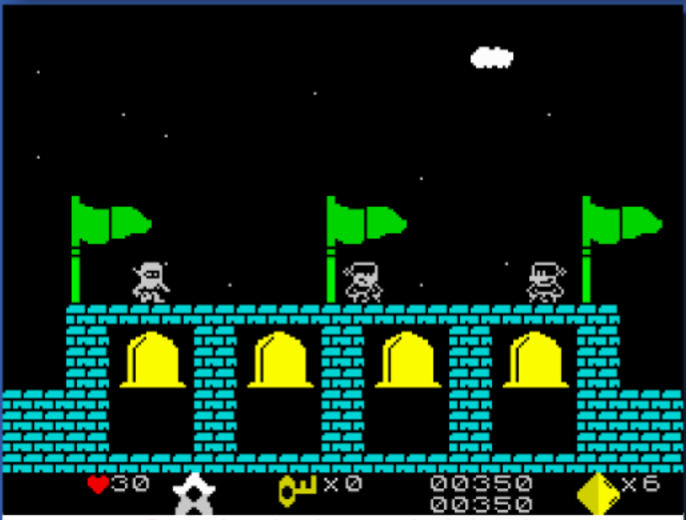
Admittedly, it's clunky—especially when wrestling with input lag—but that's the charm. Eventually, you unlock a fully operational Snake game... and that's it. A shame there's no secret "convert to ASM" final upgrade, but the journey from broken to basic is weirdly compelling.

Don Ninja

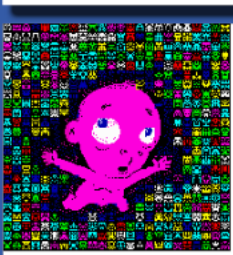
Adrian Bonnette

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44241

PWYW / $2



Dancing in the cool night air



You are Don Ninja, a nominatively quasi-determined office worker who is bored of his job. We've all been there—mundane daily activities wear us down and something needs to change. Normally, a long weekend in Skipton or an evening class gets us back on the trampoline. Sometimes though, the malaise gets so bad that you have a complete nervous breakdown, dress up as a ninja, and attempt to recover 8 stolen diamonds from the Black Ninja Clan. Which is where where this flip-screen adventure picks up.

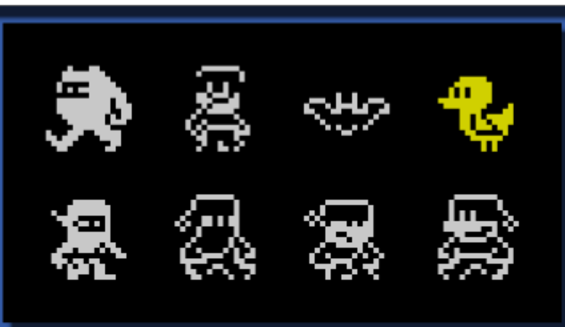
Author Adrian Bonnette is a dab-hand with graphics. The cartoony loader has clearly gone through some tidying up to fit pixels to attribute squares. The game backgrounds are more than serviceable, but it's the sprites that sing for me. I assume there's a pecking-order with ninjas, because here we have several types ranging from shuriken-fodder up to a big boss. I'm particularly fond of the monsters that stalk the forest like the love-child of a werewolf and Monty Python's Gumby.

Every good flip-screen game should give you a sense of the world being explored, that you are part of something bigger. This is very clear in Don Ninja: there's variation within the castle rooms to aid orientation, turrets & flags make it clear where the roof is, and it has toxic caverns and haunted grounds as any decent fortress should.

MmcM and Nq's (Sergey & Oleg) AY music doesn't skew 'ninja', but it certainly does give it the 'surreptitious night raid' feel it deserves. The beeper blips are more functional than sonorous, most useful for signalling when we've registered a hit—vital with those bloody patrolling bats that seem to inhabit every Spanish game made in the last decade.

You may disagree on your first attempt, but Don Ninja is relatively easy to complete. The throwing star and deadly ninja head jump are easily mastered, the map is not particularly big nor convoluted, and it's always obvious where the next key and door are. Most fails will come from lapses that land you on a field of spikes, in a lava lake, or in the path of an errant bat, leaving you cursing as you repeatedly try to get away. However, with a bit of application you'll be at the final boss before you know it. He may just be two sprites stacked together, but I still felt a slight shiver before we engaged. What's more, it's redolent of Renegade because it takes place in the back office.

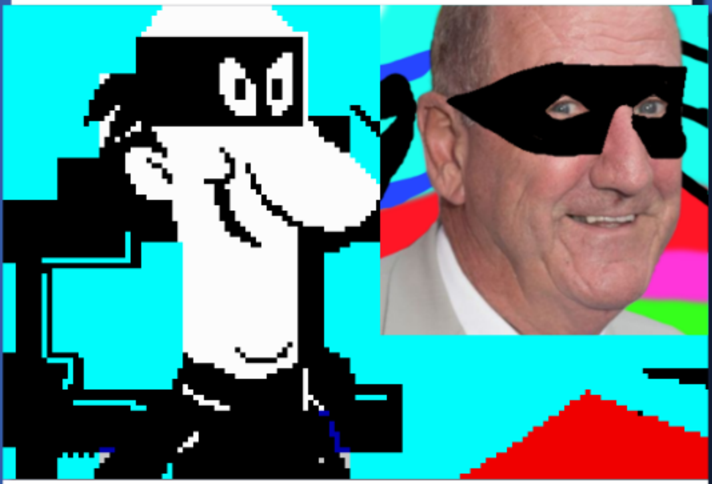
So Don Ninja is very capable of defeating the gang and getting the diamonds, which are in some unexplained way used to help the needy. This is one mid-life crisis with a happy ending.



Looking like a cross between 90s British TV comedian Russ Abbot and a budget vigilante, your hero dons an eyemask to begin his mission. But wait—did 80s ninjas actually wear eyemasks? Historically, their eyes were uncovered while the rest of their faces were concealed. By that logic, Don is, at best, an inverse ninja. Zorro wore an eyemask. The Ninja Turtles too—though British censors famously rebranded them as "Heroes in a Half-Shell," fearing Gen X might stage a populist uprising if allowed to idolize ninja chimera. (The establishment knew.)

Here's another continuity error: In-game, Don wears a black hood, not an eyemask. This inconsistency rivals Samurai Cop (1990s B-movie royalty), where the lead actor got a haircut mid-shoot and spent half the film in a laughably obvious wig.

But enough nitpicking! Don Ninja is a solid flip-screen platformer built in ZXGM. It won't rewrite the rulebook, but it's comfort food for engine veterans - a familiar, enjoyable romp.



What an atmosphere!

Telethugs

Amaweks

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44282

$6

Let's get this out of the way immediately. A game satirizing the Teletubbies as violent gun-wielding vigilantes is, to use a Spectrum-era word that describes itself - naff. Just absolutely eye-rolling naffness. Naffer, even, than the actual Teletubbies. And that's what I took into this review. My expectations were low. No, lower than that. Really low.

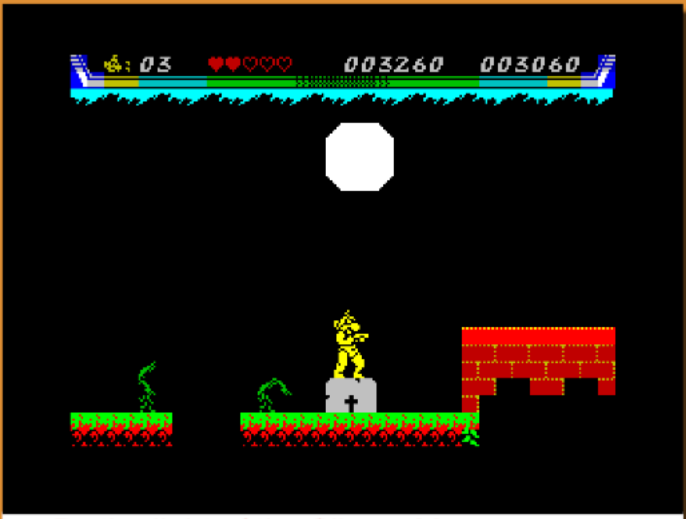
In hindsight, that's ridiculous. I hadn't taken into account that this was produced by Amaweks. On a clear day, if the wind's in a certain direction, I'll happily argue that their TCQ is the best-looking Spectrum game ever. And I went to bat for their Bruxolico in the 2023 Spectrum Computing user vote. It didn't do very well, of course. Because it cost a tenner and no-one played it. Telethugs costs $6, so not very many people are going to play this one either. Which, despite my initial scorn, would be a real shame. There is a free demo of course, but it's not a game that invites you in with open arms.

Mechanically, Telethugs is a Metal Slug-style run and gun shooter, with Tubbie-themed enemies attacking from all angles - Suns, Bunnies, Minions, those awful weirdos from 80s 'Love is…' cartoons. Your double-sized Tubbie sprite has, fortunately, unlimited ammo (Tubby Custard perhaps?) and can blaze away in a multitude of directions as they progress. There is a little bit of mechanical learning to be done - 'Up' is both jump and aim up, so you'll need to learn caution with that. But it becomes comfortable quickly and it won't be long until you're adeptly hopping about and blazing away.

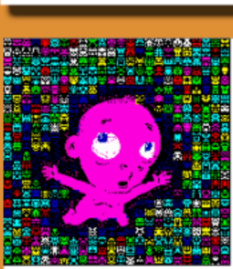
There are 5 unique environments to get through, with unique AY tunes on each, level-specific enemies sprinkled in and giant end-of-level bosses to contend with. No particular part of the 5 levels is especially difficult, although it may take a few cracks at each of the bosses to figure out the required tactic. Methodical progression is rewarded, and I felt like I was slowly getting better at executing each level on repeat plays - very satisfying. This is very much a game that you encourages you to learn as you go, and even has 3 difficulty levels so you can test yourself.

Graphically it's not as impressive as Amawek's prior games, maybe, but there is a lot going on at once, and there's a nice angular style to the depiction of the bosses. The music is classy, with each level nicely complemented by the tune, and a bit of Coolio on the title screen.

There ia a loose story, with Uncle Pennybags (the Monopoly guy) as the Big Boss, standing in for your oligarch of choice, but it hardly matters. What do matter are the lessons learned along the way : don't judge a book by its cover, and pay attention to the developer pedigree when a new game shows up. This is a top quality addition to a less frequently seen genre on the Spectrum, refreshing like a fresh breeze that blows any lingering naffness away.



By the light of the Silvery Moon. Thanks, Doris.



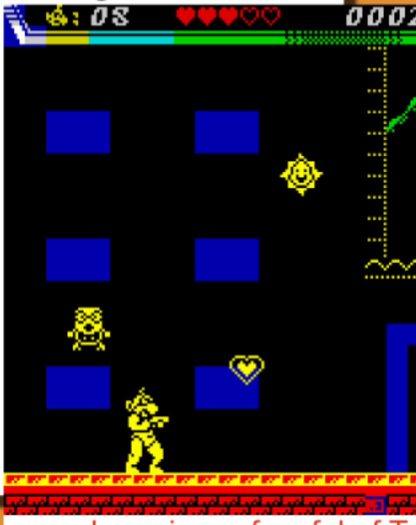
The instructions state "practice shooting in all directions — you'll need it". I say that first and foremost because it's the difference between thinking Telethugs is a masterpiece or a master fleece. The mechanic is similar to Robocop 2, so not hard to suss, but if you're not careful you're quickly smothered by smiling suns and cursing that you've wasted £4.67.

Unlike Mpk I was quite tickled by the idea of Teenage Mutant Grotesque Teletubbies, though I was puzzled by the strange mix of references. So after seeing Thomas the Tank Engine and Optimus Prime as bosses, it wouldn't have surprised me to see Trumpton making an appearance too.

A Speccy game in the 'stroll-n-gun' genre is rare and most welcome, and it takes vision to craft one with MPAGD. Amaweks has done a great job with the double-height player sprite, scrolling effects and making bosses occupy the screen without feeling too much like scenery.

ZX Telethugs is a collaboration of a group called 'Mais Odiados do Videogames' (Portuguese for 'The Most Hated in Videogames'), consisting of renowned developer Amaweks, Pedro Paiva—author of the original PC version of Telethugs, and musician Daniel Dante.

If hate gives us games this good, I don't want to know what Love Is, especially not from those two disturbing cartoon nudists.



Love is…a faceful of Tu

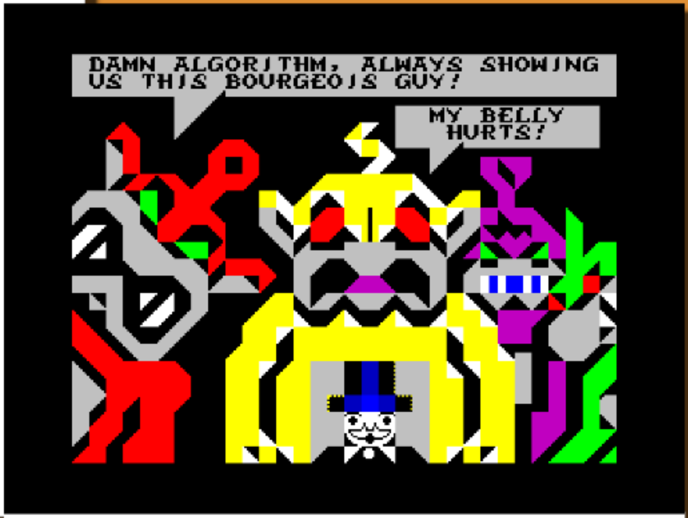
This game radiates pure 1991 energy. By the twilight of the Spectrum's commercial life, games had embraced the era's arcade ambitions: bigger sprites, smoother scrolling, and cinematic flair. For those of us who cut our teeth on a +2A, titles like Robocop and Total Recall proved the humble Spectrum could still deliver arcade-style thrills.

Yet today, these late-era gems don't command the same nostalgia as mid-80s classics. Few homebrew devs revisit this period, which makes Telethugs all the more vital. With its chunky sprites, run-and-gun chaos, and pulsing AY soundtrack, it's a welcome nod to the Spectrum's final, glorious gasp.

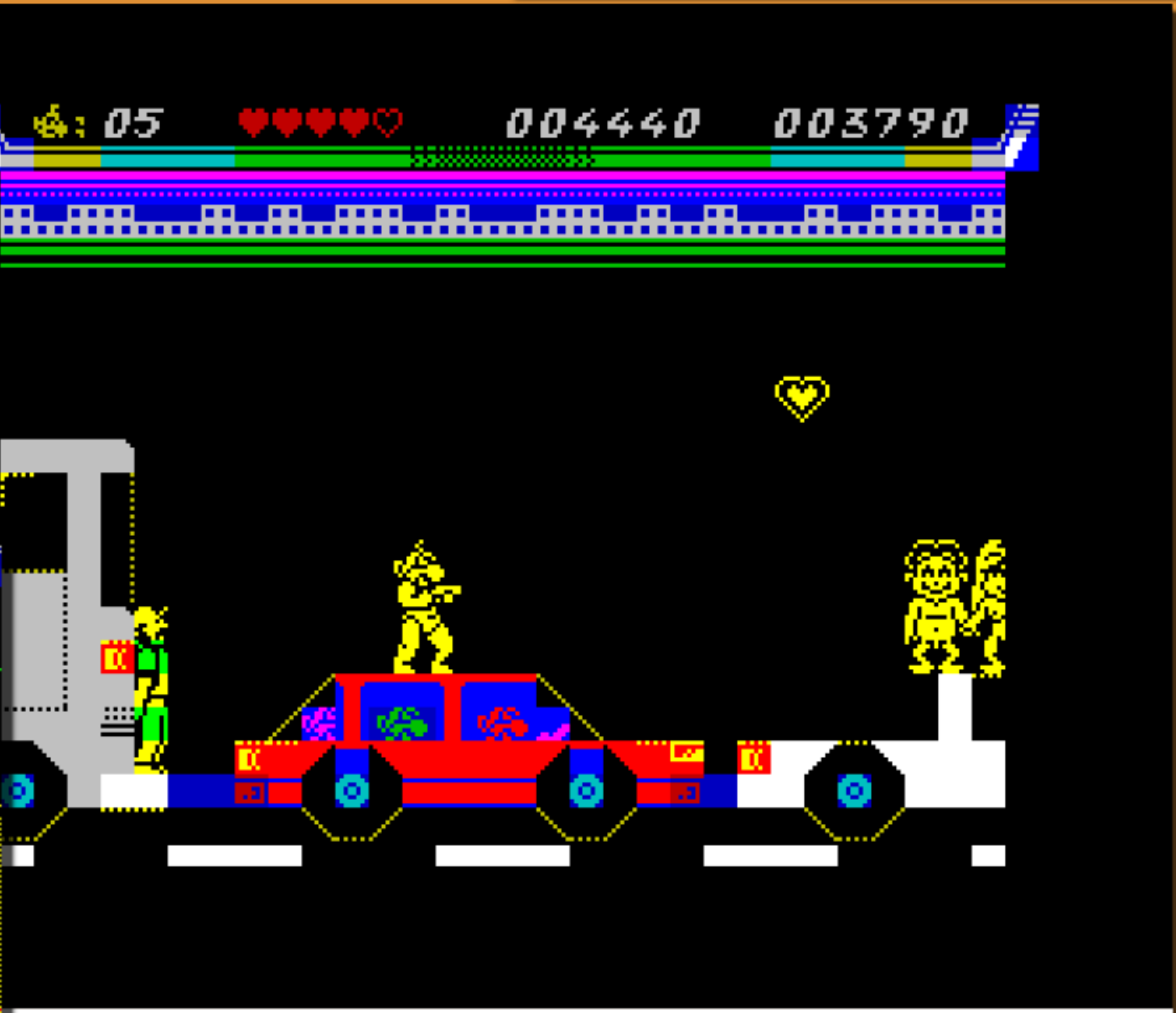
Telethugs is MPAGD pushed to its limits. Big sprites, boss fights, intricate art, and slick cutscenes weave an offbeat narrative. The first boss is a bullet sponge (my aging hands still ache), but victory required skill more than luck. Level 2's train-top showdown (a la Stop the Express) forces you to dodge tunnels while fending off waves of enemies. One misstep can mean instant death.

At $6, Telethugs seems good value for the craftsmanship on display. This isn't just a game, it's a labor of love for the Spectrum's underappreciated late era. So crack open a Tab Clear, dig out your loudest shellsuit, and let Telethugs transport you back to the 90s. The Spectrum's swan song era is back and it's as bold as ever.

Break Space Ace



The plot! In its entirety!



Heroes in a hatchback

ubby Custard

BreakSpace Hero

DH 1/07/25

This is Break Space Hero, an exciting space game for you to type on your ZX Spectrum 48K! It's all entirely written in BASIC so no machine code to worry about.

The evil Commodore Squid is trying to drain all the colour from your home planet of Magenton. The only way to stop him is to fly your advanced spaceship over his world and drop a bomb on him. He's also launching Chickenhead attack craft and Cobalt 64 missiles at Magenton, so you need to stop them too. Fortunately you are armed with the latest SinclairOMatic laser... which does have a problem with overheating.

Good luck!

Written by the lovely Snorkers especially for BreakSpace issue 2!

```
   1 REM graphics characters are preceded
with a \

  10 GO SUB 1320: GO SUB 1880

  20 LET inky=1+(INT (c/160)): INK inky

  30 FOR i=1 TO inky+1: PRINT AT 22-i,0;
BRIGHT 0; PAPER inky;a$: NEXT i

  40 IF inky=7 THEN GO SUB 830

  50 IF inky=8 THEN GO TO 960

  60 IF bomb THEN GO SUB 270

  70 IF c64 THEN GO SUB 350

  80 IF miss THEN GO SUB 770

  90 BRIGHT 0: PRINT PAPER 0;AT 20-
inky,0;b$(a TO a+31);AT 19-inky,0;c$(a TO
a+31);AT 18-inky,0;d$(a TO a+31): BRIGHT 1

 100 IF ATTR (b,xx+speed+2)<64 THEN GO TO
980

 110 LET a=a+speed: IF a>224 THEN LET a=1

 120 IF INKEY$="q" AND b>5 THEN LET b=b-1:
PRINT OVER 1;AT b,xx+speed;s$: PRINT OVER
1; INK 7;AT b+1,xx+speed-1;"\j";s$: IF b<0
THEN LET b=0

 130 IF INKEY$="a" THEN LET b=b+1: PRINT
OVER 1;AT b,xx+speed;s$: PRINT OVER 1; INK
7;AT b-1,xx+speed-1;"\j";s$: IF b>21 THEN
LET b=21

 140 IF INKEY$="p" AND speed<3 THEN LET
speed=speed+1: PRINT AT b,xx+speed-2;"
";s$

 150 IF INKEY$="o" AND speed>1 THEN LET
speed=speed-1: PRINT AT b,xx+speed;s$;"  "

 160 IF INKEY$="" THEN PRINT AT b,xx+speed;
s$

 170 IF INKEY$="m" THEN GO SUB 420: REM
laser

 180 REM bomb dropping

 190 IF INKEY$=" " AND b=7 AND NOT bomb
THEN LET bomb=1: LET bb=b+1: PRINT AT
bb,xx+speed; INK 3;"\k"

 200 IF inky=2 OR inky=4 OR inky>=6 THEN IF
NOT c64 AND RND < inky/10 THEN LET c64=1:
LET cb=INT (RND*(+5))+5: LET cc=31-speed:
LET e$="\c  "( TO speed): LET f$="   "( TO
speed)



 210 IF inky=1 OR inky=3 OR inky=5 OR
inky=7 THEN IF NOT miss AND RND <inky/20
THEN LET miss=1: LET mb=19-inky: LET mc=31-
```

```
INT (RND*14): PRINT BRIGHT 0;AT mb+1,
mc;"\h";AT mb,mc;"\i"

 220 PRINT AT b,xx+speed-1; INK 2 +
4*(z);"\j": LET z=NOT z

 230 LET c=c+speed: IF lt>0 AND RND>.9 THEN
LET lt=lt-1: BORDER lt

 240 IF c=160 OR 320 OR 480 OR 540 OR 700
OR 960 THEN GO TO 20

 250 GO TO 60

 260 REM dropping bomb

 270 PRINT OVER 1; INK 7;AT
bb,xx+speed;"\k"

 280 LET bb=bb+1

 290 LET bp=POINT
((xx+speed+(speed>0))*8,172-(bb*8))

 300 IF NOT bp THEN PRINT OVER 1;AT
bb,xx+speed; INK 3;"\k": BEEP .01,24-bb

 310 IF bp OR bb>19-inky THEN LET bomb=0

 320 IF bb=13 AND c>=1089 AND c<=1094 THEN
GO TO 1160

 330 RETURN

 340 REM C64 enemy

 350 PRINT AT cb,cc+speed;f$; OVER 1;AT
cb,cc; BRIGHT 0; INK inky-1;e$

 360 LET e$(1)=CHR$ (145+c64)

 370 LET c64=c64+1*(c64=1)-1*(c64=2)

 380 LET cc=cc-speed

 390 IF cc<0 THEN LET c64=0: PRINT AT
cb,cc+speed;" ": PRINT #0;AT 1,enemy; FLASH
1;e$(1): LET enemy=enemy+1: IF enemy=5 THEN
GO TO 900

 400 RETURN

 410 REM laser

 420 LET lt=lt+1

 430 IF lt>7 THEN GO TO 940

 440 BORDER lt

 450 PLOT INK lt; OVER 1;40+speed*8,171-
b*8: DRAW INK lt; OVER 1;214-speed*8,0

 460 BEEP .05,24

 470 DRAW OVER 1; INK 7;-214+speed*8,0

 480 IF miss AND (b=mb OR b=mb-1) THEN GO
TO 630
```

```
 490 IF NOT c64 THEN RETURN
 500 IF b<>cb THEN RETURN
 510 LET c64=0
 520 LET cc=cc+speed
 530 REM Graphic L
 540 PRINT AT cb,cc; INK 6;"\l"
 550 BEEP .05,-24
 560 REM Graphic L
 570 PRINT AT cb,cc; INK 2;"\l"
 580 BEEP .05,-12
 590 PRINT AT cb,cc;a$( TO 31-cc)
 600 LET score=score+10
 610 PRINT #0;AT 0,7;score
 620 RETURN
 630 REM Hit a missile
 640 LET miss=0
 650 LET mc=mc
 660 REM Graphic L
 670 PRINT AT mb,mc; INK 6;"\l";AT mb-1,mc;
INK 6;"\l"
 680 BEEP .05,-24
 690 REM Graphic L
 700 PRINT AT mb,mc; INK 2;"\l";AT mb-1,mc;
INK 2;"\l"
 710 BEEP .05,-12
 720 PRINT AT mb,mc;" ";AT mb-1,mc;" "
 730 LET score=score+25
 740 PRINT #0;AT 0,7;score
 750 RETURN
 760 REM missile, graphics H and I
 770 PRINT BRIGHT 0; OVER 1; INK 7;AT mb-1,
mc;"\h";AT mb,mc;"\i"
 780 LET mb=mb-1: LET mc=mc-speed
 790 PRINT BRIGHT 0; OVER 1;AT mb-1,
mc;"\h";AT mb,mc;"\i"
 800 IF mb<2 OR mc<speed THEN LET miss=0:
PRINT AT mb-1,mc;" ";AT mb,mc;" ": PRINT
```

```
#0;AT 0,26+mcount; FLASH 1;"\h";AT
1,26+mcount; FLASH 1;"\i": LET
mcount=mcount+1: IF mcount=5 THEN GO TO 920
 810 RETURN
 820 REM last level
 830 REM Graphic mno then pqr
 840 LET c$(166 TO 168)="\m\n\o"
 850 LET b$(166 TO 168)="\p\q\r"
 860 RETURN
 880 REM Defeat
 900 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 2; PAPER 6; FLASH 1;
BRIGHT 0;"Too many enemies got through..."
 910 GO TO 990
 920 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 2; PAPER 6; FLASH 1;
BRIGHT 0;"Too many missiles got through..."
 930 GO TO 990
 940 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 2; PAPER 6; FLASH 1;
BRIGHT 0;"Your laser overheated..."
 950 GO TO 990
 960 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 2; PAPER 6; FLASH 1;
BRIGHT 0;"You missed your chance!!!"
 970 GO TO 990
 980 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 2; PAPER 6; FLASH 1;
BRIGHT 0;"K A B O O M ! ! ! ! !"
 990 INPUT "Try again? y/n",q$
1000 IF q$="y" THEN GO SUB 1320: GO TO 20
1010 PAPER 1: INK 5: CLS
1020 FOR i=0 TO 12
1030 PLOT 120,80-i
1040 DRAW 0,50+i*2,-3.6
1050 PLOT 120,105+i: DRAW 20+i,0
1060 PLOT INK 2;120,100-i: DRAW INK
2;20+i,0
1070 NEXT i
1080 PRINT AT 15,0;"The people of Magenton
are"
1090 PRINT "condemned to slow loading times
"
1100 PRINT "and dull colours."
```

```
1110 PRINT ''"... nice music though."
1120 STOP
1140 REM Victory
1160 PAPER 0: INK 2
1170 PRINT FLASH 1; PAPER 6; BRIGHT 1;AT
12,167-a;"\l\l\l": REM graphic L
1180 PRINT FLASH 1; PAPER 6; INVERSE 1;
BRIGHT 1;AT 13,167-a;"\l\l\l"
1190 LET a=0
1200 FOR i=21 TO 14 STEP -1
1210 REM graphic E, then 5 graphic shift 8s
1220 PRINT AT
i,a;"\e\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shi
ft+8"
1230 PRINT AT i,a+6; PAPER 2; INK
6;"\e\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift
+8"
1240 PRINT AT i,a+12; PAPER 6; INK
5;"\e\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift
+8"
1250 PRINT AT i,a+18; PAPER 5; INK
4;"\e\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift
+8"; PAPER 4; INK 0;"\e"
1260 LET a=a+1
1270 BEEP .05,a
1280 NEXT i
1290 PRINT AT 5,0; FLASH 1;"The people of
Magenton are free!"
1300 PRINT FLASH 1; INVERSE 1;"You are
truly a BREAK SPACE HERO"
1310 GO TO 9999
1320 LET c=0
1330 LET a=1: LET b=14
1340 LET speed=1: LET xx=3
1350 LET bomb=0
1360 LET rocket=0
1370 LET c64=0
1380 LET bp=1
1390 LET bb=15: LET mb=15
1400 LET score=0
```

```
1410 LET enemy=0
1420 LET miss=0
1430 LET mcount=0
1440 LET lt=0
1450 REM Graphic A and B
1460 LET s$=CHR$ 16+CHR$ 5+"\a\b "
1470 PAPER 0: INK 7: CLS
1471 PRINT "Break Space Hero"'
1480 LET z$="The good people of Magenton "
1490 LET z$=z$+"are threatened by the evil
Commodore"
1500 LET z$=z$+"Squid and his rubbish
computers. "
1510 LET z$=z$+CHR$ 13
1520 LET z$=z$+"You must pilot your
advanced " +CHR$ 13
1530 LET z$=z$+"Sinclair spaceship and drop
a "
1540 LET z$=z$+"bomb on him." +CHR$ 13
+CHR$ 13 + "Watch out for "
1550 LET z$=z$+"evil C64 missiles and alien
"
1560 LET z$=z$+"attack craft." +CHR$ 13
+CHR$ 13
1570 LET z$=z$+"Press a key to continue"
1580 GO SUB 2230
1590 IF INKEY$<>"" THEN GO TO 1590
1600 IF INKEY$="" THEN GO TO 1600
1610 CLS
1620 LET z$="Controls are: " +CHR$ 13
1630 LET z$=z$+"Q to climb " +CHR$ 13
1640 LET z$=z$+"O to slow down " +CHR$ 13
1650 LET z$=z$+"P to speed up " +CHR$ 13
1660 LET z$=z$+"A to dive" +CHR$ 13
1670 LET z$=z$+"M to fire your CliveOmatic
laser "
1680 LET z$=z$+ "(watch out for
overheating)" +CHR$ 13
1690 LET z$=z$+"space to drop the bomb"
```

```
+CHR$ 13 + " at the correct height " +CHR$
13 +CHR$ 13

1700 LET z$=z$+"Press a key to start"

1710 GO SUB 2230

1720 IF INKEY$<>"" THEN GO TO 1720

1730 IF INKEY$="" THEN GO TO 1730

1740 REM Clear the screen

1750 PAPER 0: INK 3: BORDER 0: BRIGHT 1:
CLS

1760 REM I chose RANDOMIZE 15 as it gave a
nice pattern for the stars

1770 RANDOMIZE 15

1780 LET z=0

1790 REM Set up a nice field of stars

1800 INK 7: FOR i=0 TO 255: LET y=INT
(RND*142)+30: PLOT i,y: NEXT i

1810 REM Draw our home planet

1820 INK 3: FOR i=0 TO 16: CIRCLE 200,155,
i: NEXT i

1830 REM With beautiful rings

1840 FOR i=0 TO 3 STEP 2: PLOT 175,160-i:
DRAW OVER 1;50,-8,1: DRAW -50,8,1: NEXT i

1850 PRINT #0;AT 0,0;"Score: ";score

1860 RANDOMIZE 0

1870 RETURN

1880 DIM a$(32)

1890 DIM b$(256)

1900 REM This array is Graphic E, then
shift Graphic 8 three times, then Graphic
G, then three spaces

1910 FOR i=1 TO 256 STEP 8

1920 LET b$(i TO
i+7)="\e\Shift+8\Shift+8\Shift+8\g   "

1930 NEXT i

1940 REM This string is space, Graphic E,
shift Graphic 8, Graphic G, 4 spaces

1950 LET c$="": FOR a=1 TO 32: LET c$=c$+"
\e\Shift+8\g    ": NEXT a

1960 REM This string is 2 spaces, Graphic
F, 5 spaces
```

```
1970 LET d$="": FOR a=1 TO 32: LET d$=d$+"
\f     ": NEXT a

1980 REM Set up the User Defined Graphics

1990 FOR i=0 TO 143

2000 READ g

2010 POKE USR "a"+i,g

2020 NEXT i

2030 RETURN

2040 REM Put all the DATA at the end

2050 DATA 0,224,127,63,245,63,127,224: REM
back of spaceship going right

2060 DATA 0,0,240,252,87,252,240,0: REM
front of spaceship going right

2070 DATA 24,228,34,2,34,228,24,0: REM
chicken enemy frame 1

2080 DATA 24,4,226,2,226,4,24,0: REM
chicken enemy frame 2

2090 DATA 1,3,7,15,31,63,127,255: REM
planet surface, sloping up and right

2100 DATA 0,0,0,0,24,60,126,255: REM planet
surface, peak

2110 DATA 128,192,224,240,248,252,254,255:
REM planet surface, sloping down and right

2120 DATA 24,52,110,110,118,126,118,110:
REM top of C64 missile

2130 DATA 102,106,118,126,106,98,122,126:
REM bottom of C64 missile

2140 DATA 0,0,0,6,31,6,0,0: REM thruster
flame

2150 DATA 128,222,191,191,222,128,0,0: REM
bomb

2160 DATA 102,247,234,52,107,183,237,102:
REM explosion

2170 DATA 159,96,15,48,192,15,112,0: REM
boss 1

2180 DATA 128,70,175,95,59,245,59,111: REM
boss 2

2190 DATA 0,0,129,195,247,249,255,249: REM
boss 3

2200 DATA 0,112,15,192,48,15,96,159: REM
boss 4

2210 DATA 111,59,245,59,95,175,70,128: REM
boss 5

2220 DATA 249,255,249,247,195,129,0,0: REM
```

boss 6

```
2230 FOR i=1 TO LEN z$
2240 PRINT z$(i);
2250 BEEP .05,CODE z$(i)/4
2260 NEXT i
2270 RETURN
```

Not only is Snorkers a technical wiz, but he's a gent as well. As such, he has provided some explanatory notes to accompany the code. Take it away, Snorkers…

I keep a count of how far you progress with the variable "c". Every 160 times, this will increase the ink colour, giving a sense of progression.

"bomb", "c64" and "miss" are all subroutines that handle, well, dropping the bomb, the enemy spacecraft and the missile.

Line 90 is where the magic happens. This prints the landscape. b$,c$ and d$ are 256 character arrays that contain the hills. I print them BRIGHT 0, as Commodore stuff all lacks nice bright colours.

Line 100 checks for collision. ATTR inspects the attribute byte of the square on the screen we are about to move into. If it is less than 64, it is NOT BRIGHT, so we've hit something... either the ground or an enemy.

Lines 120 and 130 deal with moving up and down. We PRINT OVER the current position and PRINT OVER the new position. This means that we preserve the stars in the background.

Lines 200 and 210 decide what enemies we face. Attack craft on levels 2,4,6 and 7, missiles on 1,3,5 and 7. The chance of them appearing increases... can you see how?

Lines 410 to 750 control firing a laser. The laser temperature increases each time you fire it, but cools down over time. We do a nice "beep" sound, then check to see if you hit a missile or an attack craft. If we hit, we do a little explosion and a BEEP and then give you some points.

Lines 880 to 990 cover the different ways you can lose... and you are then offered another chance... unless you're chicken. There are "Game Over" and "Victory" screens!

Line 1320 onwards sets up all the variables onwards. You want to do this set up early in the program FLOW but NOT early in the program, as BASIC has to read the entire program repeatedly to make it run. So jumping to a high number to set things up is good practice.

Lines 1480 to 1580 print the back story. Originally this was just text on the screen, but I added a little subroutine at line 2230 to give a sort of teleprinter effect. This could be further improved by giving a little asterisk like on Grandstand...

Lines 1740 print the background. I set up random stars but sometimes there were several stars in a row, which looked weird. By setting RANDOMIZE to a known value, I could get a known pattern of stars, and "15" seemed fine to me. But I then RANDOMIZE 0 on line 1860 to get proper random numbers.

Lines 1810 to 1840 draw our planet Magenton. Drawing solid circles in BASIC is tricky. It can be done, but the CIRCLE command is not the way to do it. Imagine that the dark pixels represent mountains, or maybe damage caused by C64 missiles. The two DRAW commands are used to create the rings. The first one is OVER, so it casts a shadow over the planet. The second one is behind the planet, so most of it is just drawing magenta pixels on top of magenta pixels. Looks OK though!

Lines 1900 to 1970 set up the graphics for the planet surface. DIM a$(32) sets up a string of 32 spaces. I learned this trick from Animated ALex, as previously I would be literally typing 32 spaces. The next arrays are 256 bytes long, but I fill them with multiple blocks of 8 characters. You can set multiple entries in an array using the substring method, just like with PRINT.

And at the end we have the traditional DATA statements for the graphics.

Good luck and good typing! Don't forget that REM statements don't need to be typed in, they are just for notes. And some lines are very similar, so you can copy and change them using the EDIT command.

Goblinarama

Zero Budget

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44323

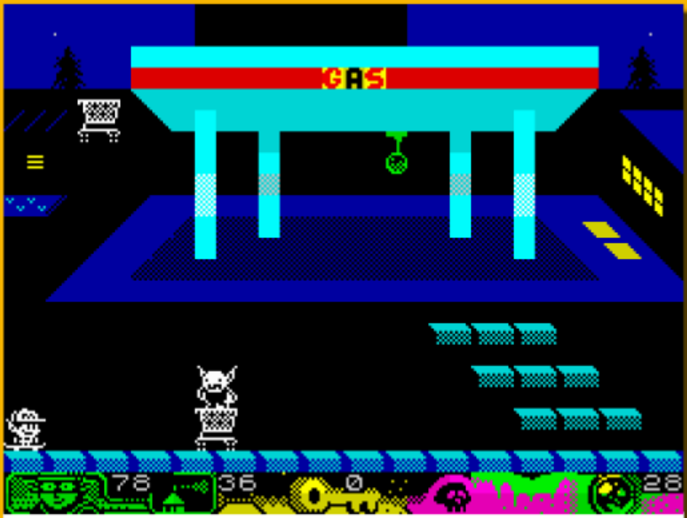
Free

I never knew much—if anything—about the life cycle of Goblins. It's not something I've needed to think about before. If push came to shove, I might have guessed it involved some squalid mounting ritual with lots of grunting and immiscible pinky-green fluids. It turns out they actually reproduce by infecting people and hatching from eggs, if the plot of Goblinarama is anything to go by.

Your job is to do what Norman Tebbit's dad did—get on your skateboard, look for goblin eggs, and don't stop until you've destroyed them all. There are 28 in total, spread all over Darkel Town, which sounds like a place in Humberside whose biggest worry would normally be their position in the Vauxhall Conference(It's not been called that since 1998. Also, c'mon The Iron! - Ed). Now though, it's descended into chaos because all the residents have 'caught goblin'. And you're no exception—if you thought you were immune then take a good look at yourself in the loading screen.

The loading and splash screens throughout the game are outstanding. The source images may be AI, but they've been nicely crafted post-digitisation to make the Speccy's colours sing. Zero Budget's in-game graphics are great too, the USP here being the pseudo 3D backgrounds. Some screens really do make you feel like you're exploring a landscape, and part of the fun is picking your way through it. We of course also have the arcade staples of patrolling nasties which you can dispatch with spraypaint picked up along the way.

Getting to see the whole game is quite a challenge. There's a lot of nooks, crannies, and difficult to access areas in the sky and underground. You'll need to kill all the baddies on the screen to unblock some areas, and reaching others requires a deft jump on their heads to



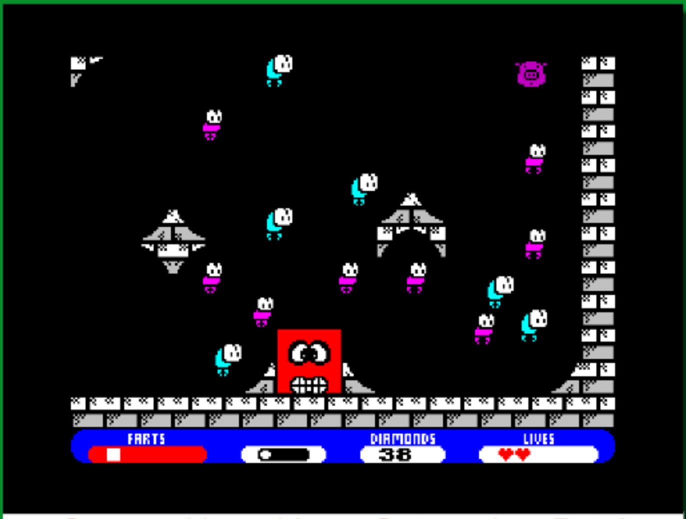
That bloke's on his trolley

Basterdale Farm

The Death Squad

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44324

PWYW / $2



Cornered by…things, Get moving, Pete!

Of all the modern developers, none have a style so immediately recognisable as Death Squad, who's massive colourful sprites stand out clear as day. I was a big fan of Mutant Mushrooms from last year, and Basterdale shifts the engine from MM's Robotron style to a Sabre-Wulf style.

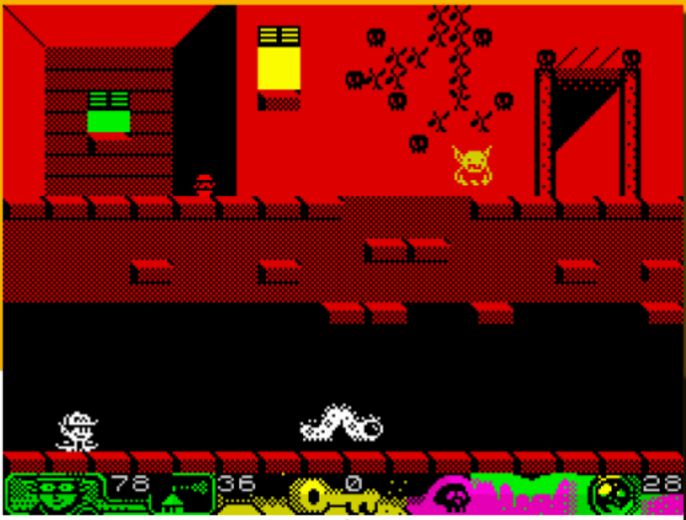
There's a plot here of sorts - Pete the pig is facing death, as his farm's new owners plan to kill him and eat him. So he's on a quest to find 100 diamonds so that the old owners can buy the farm back. But Pete, buddy. They're going to kill you and eat you as well, that's the whole point. Unless you've figured out how to lay eggs or grow wool. He hasn't really thought this through, hasn't realised that those people who tell you they're your friends really aren't, sometimes. Can't expect too much from a pig, I guess.

Pig or not, Pete moves quickly through the incredibly weird fields of Basterdale Farm, needing to dodge the various oddball creatures which home in on him relentlessly. Not an issue when there's, like, 3 of them, but certain rooms will have hordes of the blasted things. Rather like a Robotron game, the trick is to lure them in one direction before making an end-run the other way, breaking ankles like a porkier Walter Payton. When it gets too much, though, Pete can deploy a literally room-clearing gas blast. Could Walter do that? It's not been documented, if so.

The map is quite extensive and mazelike, which makes exploration engaging, and the basic kiting mechanic is pretty fun once you get used to the idea. Some of the sprites and background creatures are recycled from other DeathSquad games, which is a tad disappointing, and there's very little that says 'farm', other than arguably some stone walls and the likeable Pete himself.

get an extra bounce. Some areas are accessed with good old fashioned keys.

Goblinarama is an impressive first effort from this author, and a nice addition to the ZXGM catalogue. If Zero Budget's name truly does reflect their financial circumstances, they clearly already have the necessary tools at their disposal to make a great game. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to don my Converse All Stars, get on my board, find a marauding goblin, ollie onto their head and send it good and proper



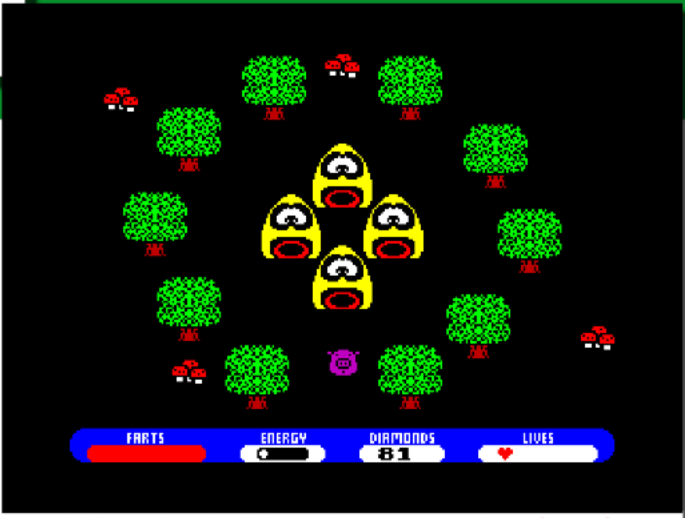
Mean Streets

They say first impressions count. My first impressions of this game were that I was in for an extremely frustrating experience. The perspective is all skewey, is your character jumping or is he moving into the background? How the hell do you get out of the room? You can't jump out the window & there's nowhere to go...and that weird bat demon is irritating as hell, why can't I kill it?...oh game over.

Right, keep at it, second go, ammunition found, bat dispatched, door opened, we're out in the street and off & running! It wasn't long until I started really getting into it. There's a whole big world to explore and once you get used to the quirky perspective it actually becomes a nice little feature, I mean look at those screenshots, aren't they fun?

Although it's quite a tricky game, there are a plethora of pickups to be had to replenish your health and weaponry, which will keep you exploring underground, overground goblining free. There's plenty of humour to discover too, with goblins riding about in shopping trolleys, oversized caterpillars, arcade machines and a big rocket. There are some light puzzle elements too as you try to figure out how to get past certain areas.The visuals and the music are great and it all adds up to a splendid debut from Zero Budget that's easy to recommend. I ended up having lots of fun with this game, maybe first impressions aren't that important after all!

But you're not here for the plot, or any kind of coherent thought, you're here for a technically nifty, hyper-colouful twitchy action game. And that's what you get.



What the hell is going on on that farm?

The Death Squad have carved out quite a niche line in splicing jaw droppingly colourful graphics with pub bore politics. The 8-bit equivalent of having Aardman Animations characters spouting yer uncle's "anti-woke" patter. All that aside - is the game any good? At the risk of spoiling the rest of the review, the answer is yes.

The gameplay is classic twitch arcade action and uses extremely slick coding to craft something that manages to look and feel both very classicaly Spectrum and at the same time beyond what a Spectrum should be capable of.

This is another modern game that makes good use of the ULA+ mode. While for many games it is fairly superfluous, there are some good design choices here that make it really pop in whichever mode you play with.

It's not just a pretty face though, it's fun to play and the sprawling gameplay arena provides quite the challenge. Things can get really hectic on your diamond quest and it soon becomes vital that you employ Mpk's "follow the leader" luring tactics to draw the nasties away from where you need to go. You also need to learn the value of a well timed smart bomb, or should that be "fart bomb".

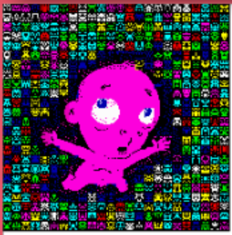
I have to give a special mention to the music. With the award winning Lee Bee on tunes you're always on to a winner and it's no different here. Sheer perfection from the wonderful uptempo rendition of the Emmerdale Farm theme tune, to the game's bouncy backing tracks.

Echoes of Atlantis

iCreateWorlds

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44003

PWYW / $2



If you're ready to hold his hand, then author Luis Peres will take you on quite an odyssey in Echoes of Atlantis. It's a 6 part text adventure that takes us from Egypt to, well—Egypt. Alexandria to Giza to be precise, which is 100 miles as the crow flies, but this takes a biggish detour via the Sahara, Antarctica, Rapa Nui (aka Easter Island for fans of Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen), and deepest India. And 6 'parts' means actually means 6 full games, so you'll need to book a holiday for this one.

On the way we use ancient instruments like an Astrolab, Antikythera mechanism (back from Google yet? Every day's a school day innit), but we also command robots, ray guns, teleporters and flying palaces. So I'm not sure when this is set, but this eclectic content gives it an ahistoric feel anyway.

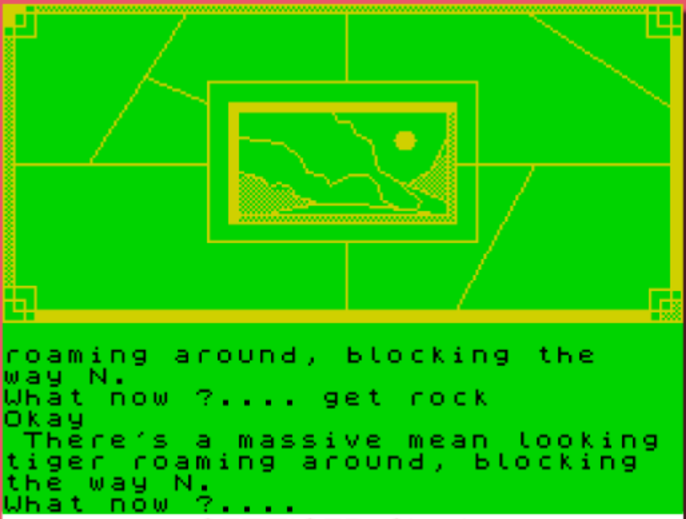
Luis Peres is a professional illustrator, and boy does it show in the game's additional material. If he ever decides to do a physical release, the inlay, maps and story book would make for a box set so grand that your hooky C90s would jump off the shelves in shame. Nowadays, such epic scale, presentation, research and concept is only matched by Davide Bucci's superb text adventures like The Queen's Footsteps.

The text is limited, largely by memory restrictions, so the images and logical colour coding help: yellow for Egypt, white for Antarctica, blue for Oceania and green for jungle. Scene images change regularly, and they sit inside a never-changing larger framing image. This is an attempt to enhance the smaller inset images, but unfortunately it does the opposite – I barely notice them as a result. It'd be much better to let the tiny pictures speak for themselves and have more room for text.

While you can play each chapter out of sequence, it's better to see the story unfold in order. But don't expect a learning curve—it varies greatly throughout. I found the Sahara and Rapa Nui chapters the most fun and intuitive. What's more it's helped me choose my next holiday destinations (Blackpool and Anglesey). Other chapters were more frustrating, requiring lots of peeking at the walkthrough.

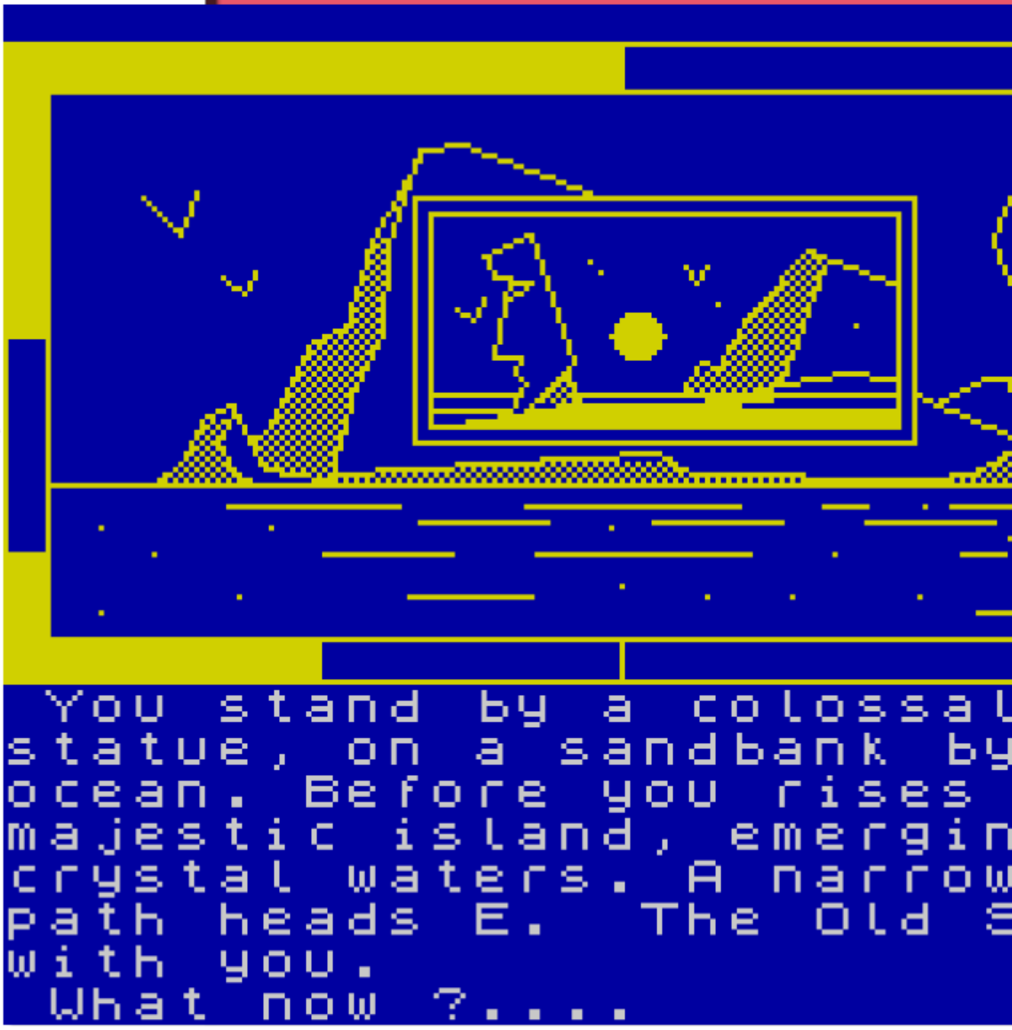
It'll probably take you chapter 1 to get used to the eccentricities: needing to examine every location name that has just been described, as opposed to examining things within it; it's rarely possible to examine an object, and never when it's in your inventory.

As with all journeys, you have to take the rough with the smooth. So for me, driving to the Peak District involves using the M61, and playing an Icreateworlds game involves the Graphic Adventure Creator. The interface is clunky and slow, and the tiny text window needs refreshing often. It would be better with PAW or Quill. GAC is just what Luis knows and likes to work with—it's something to accept, but it's worth accepting because it's one hell of a journey.



```
roaming around, blocking the
way N.
What now ?.... get rock
Okay
 There's a massive mean looking
tiger roaming around, blocking
the way N.
What now ?....
```

GET TIGER. Clearly.



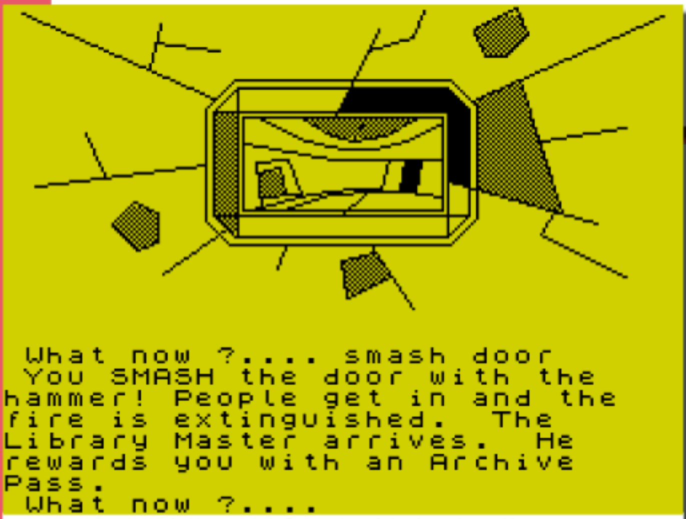
```
 You stand by a colossal
statue, on a sandbank by
ocean. Before you rises
majestic island, emergin
crystal waters. A narrow
path heads E. The Old
with you.
 What now ?....
```

GET MAOI

I have a 16-year-old car. I should get rid of it, and at some point someone in authority is going to examine it and force me to. There are much ‘better’, more efficient, possibly even safer cars available. But it gets me where I want to go, and I like it, and I don’t *want* to get rid of it. So until my regular mechanic, who gave up on selling me something else years ago, points out an expensive upcoming fix I will continue to drive The Greatest Car Ever Made Despite All The Evidence.

And Luis wlll keep using GAC, and that’s just fine. Because, much like my reliable old jalopy, GAC delivers him, and the player, through an epic journey here with some great scenery along the way. Moment-to-moment, the frustrations of the engine are similar to the ones I had with Issue One’s The House That Wept. You have to learn to examine the room you’re in, as Dave mentioned, and sometimes the parser seems uncooperative.

Text adventures aren’t for everyone, and this is not one to convince the doubters. But if you have the patience to persevere (with the walkthru on standby) then this is quite an achievement. 6 games in one, really, and enough to keep a keen adventurer locked in for quite some time.



```
 What now ?.... smash door
 You SMASH the door with the
hammer! People get in and the
fire is extinguished.  The
Library Master arrives.  He
rewards you with an Archive
Pass.
 What now ?....
```

Library Card - Unlocked!

In last month’s review of iCreateWorlds’ eerie The House That Wept, we queried whether GAC was helping or hindering. Luis responded with some technical details :

The reason why the graphics are simple is because, due to the GAC’s memory limitations, after writing all the internal conditions that ensure the game’s mechanics, I’m usually left with only 2 or 3Kb to draw graphics for all the locations.

Another thing players don’t realize is that GAC consumes memory much faster with text than with graphics. Which means that even if I gave up the simple graphics, it actually wouldn’t make a difference in the size of the descriptions, and I couldn’t use that memory to expand the text. Just writing a single paragraph would use up those 3Kb. So it’s always better to spend those 3Kb on drawings — no matter how simple they are, they always help the player get oriented — rather than spending 3Kb on text that would disappear in just one or two sentences.

What players don’t know in my GAC adventures is that 70% of the 21Kb of memory I have for each game is always used on programming logic conditions that ensure the structure has no gaps. I have to anticipate things, actions, or words that the player might try to type, even if they never end up using them. There’s a lot of complex logic behind the apparent simplicity that the player sees on screen. And that’s where almost all of the game’s memory goes. Then about 25% goes into the short descriptions which, even though they’re telegraphic, still use up a lot of memory with each sentence. The remaining 5% of memory — after descriptions and programming — if I’m lucky, goes toward graphics.

One day I may try to create an adventure using some other thing other than GAC, but for now I love it because its the perfect "sketchbook" to plan stories. Super fast to program, simple to structure a story that can be converted easily into a book and it gives me the same joy as it did back in 1990.

All fair points. We would note that even on a 48k machine, PAW frees up more memory for use, with free compression, and will give you 117k to play with if targetting a 128k Spectrum. And punyInform, as seen in Echoes of the Future this month, brings the cross-platform standard Inform engine to the +3, and allows streaming from the disk.

But of course, Luis should do what’s best for him. Changing engine is not a trivial undertaking. There’s more to an iCreateWorlds package than just the software and we look forward to future creations.

```
 head
 the
a
g  from
 sand
age  is
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Bubble Cop

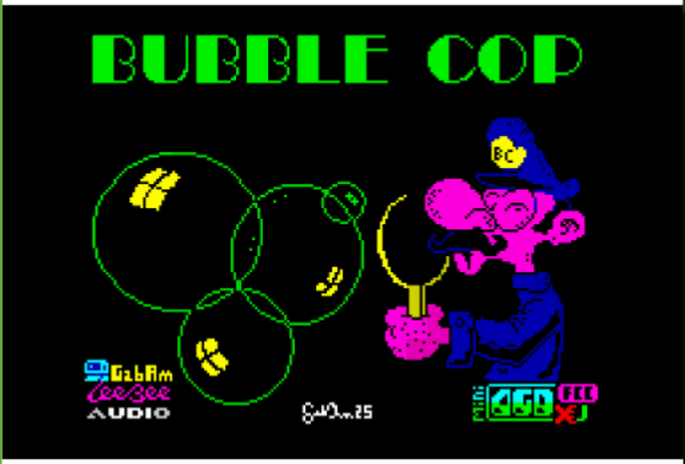
Gabriele Amore

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44314

Free

This is another of GabAm's colourful, cartoonish character square games, and keeping with the 'C's you play a Cop. Bubble Cop. Through 10 levels you have to recover the stolen ruby rings from the evil Mouse Gang. This verminous crime collective don't take any prisoners and appear to be very well funded—they have flying bombers, mousey missile launchers, and of course what self-respecting gangster would be without a Tommy Gun. Against this formidable arsenal, you have… a soap bubble wand. That needs reloading every 3 bubbles. Right—lemme attem!

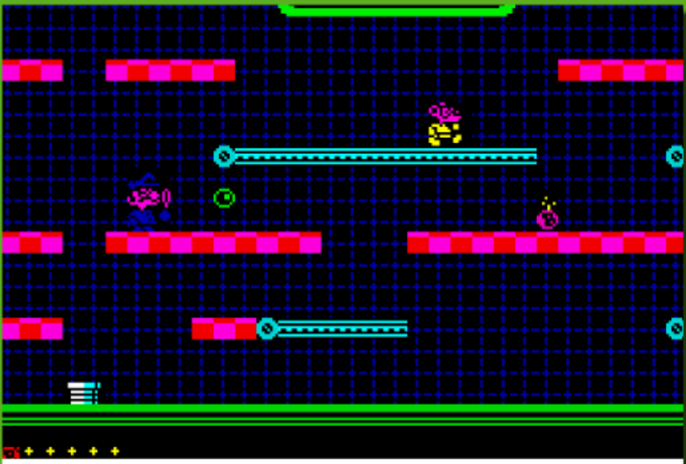
As you'd expect, the graphics are superb and Gab's signature style instantly recognisable. Bubble Cop appears somewhat Luigi-ish and the mobsters all buy their clothes from Prohibition Era Gangster Surplus (for mice). The character square alignment means everything is in glorious Specnicolour. The ruby rings have a shiny red rock on a gold band, and true to life, they turn into bombs if you don't pick them up quickly enough (and that's the real reason Ratner's went bust).



There's Bubble Brewing

The crime theme, screen wrapping and jumping spring mechanism instantly made me think of Players' 1988 game Crimebusters. That wasn't far from the mark as the actual inspiration was Mappy, the game Crimebusters itself is based on. When you're on the same platform (or more accurately have the same Y coordinate) the mice are darn quick on the draw and start rat-tat-tat-tatting at you. But they only shoot at your ankles (so maybe they do take prisoners), and with continued tapping of the jump key, you can hover over them with impunity.

Like a lot of GabAm's games, it's difficult but short. More could have been done with the idea, but I think that's how this developer's mind works: a flurry of activity, followed by a new brainwave and on to the next project. There is a level skip key, which I have mixed feelings about. It's certainly welcome in getting past the early trainer levels, but it does give it the air of a demo version.



Mouse on the Run

Although Bubble Cop left me feeling a bit undernourished, there's a lot going for it. The player will get to experience every level and the final big boss, which is not something most of us can say about Speccy games.

Oh, for Bubble Cops! That's the kind of cop you want in your neighborhood—a far cry from the trigger-happy sort who mistakes your foil-wrapped sandwich for a Glock. The idea of an officer shooting first and asking questions later becomes 1,000% less terrifying when you know he's armed only with bubbles.

Yet don't be fooled by the whimsy: our titular bobby requires nerves of steel. Every morning, he kisses his wife goodbye as if for the last time before heading out, equipped with nothing but watered-down dish soap and a plastic dipper. The streets (and sewers) of his world are crawling with gun-toting rats—and yes, bullets travel faster than bubbles. (Having played the game, I can confirm this brutally.)

But the tension melts away the moment you see how adorably this game executes its premise. It takes real talent to make something this smooth, this fluid, and this bubble-licious to behold. I'm fizzing with praise—effervescent, even. From its novel concept to its flawless execution, I'm smitten.

Only one snag threatens to burst my bubble: it's insanely hard. They say never bring a knife to a gunfight—well, our cop brought bubbles. This was never going to be a walk in the park!

Still, how could Bubble Cop's gentle policing fail to win us over? This game is breath of fresh air—or at least, a floating, iridescent sphere of it.

Steve's Quest for Coins

Steve Tyson

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44306

Free

Here at Break Space Towers we're a diverse and eclectic bunch. As you'd expect, we don't agree on much. The best way to eat a KitKat? Does pineapple belong on pizza? Is a hot dog a sandwich? All hotly debated, with no agreement in sight. But one thing we agree on is how much we love seeing someone code their first Spectrum game.

We love it because for so many of us, it's a rite of passage - long dreamed of, buried deep in early nostalgia. Making a game is the fulfilment of that childhood dream. Remember when you couldn't tie your own shoelaces? When everything was hard and you dreamed of mastering impossible things? Like machine code. Sprites. Loading screens.

Wordsworth once wrote that 'The child is the father of the man'. I take that to mean the past creates the present. That, paradoxically, youth teaches the old, and that wonder preserved from youth enriches maturity.

And so we come to Steve Tyson's very first computer game - Steve's Quest for Coins.

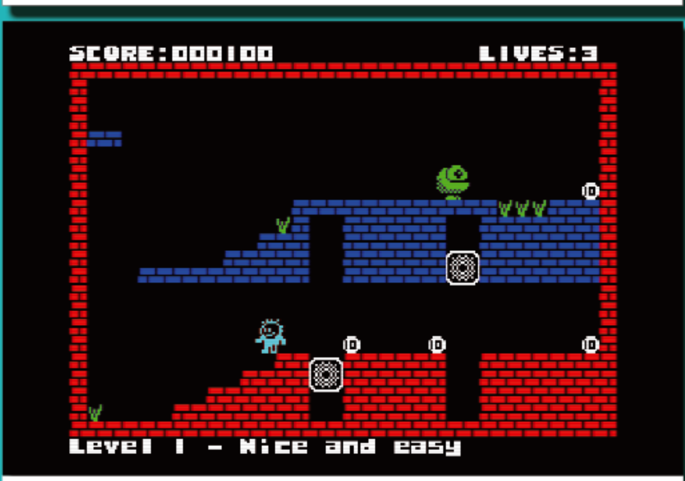
At its heart, this is a Manic Miner-style platformer where you collect items while avoiding enemies and spiky plants. Grab the last item on screen and you're onto the next level. There are 20 levels in total, but seeing them all is no easy feat - this game is rock hard, sometimes unfairly so.

There's so much to love here. It's a straightforward platformer without fancy graphics, but impressively polished for a first effort. The font Steve chose is really nice, the start menu is well-featured, the loading screen is strong, and the levels progress beautifully from easy to brutally difficult. One particular enemy - that drops on your head when you get close - kept making me laugh. Even after it killed me for the 50th time – The deaths were fair because they felt like my own fault.

What wasn't always fair was the collision detection. Those green spiky plants became frustrating, and the green acid managed to kill me when it wasn't even visible on screen. At one point I died while perfectly centred between three enemies - nowhere near any of them. I laughed in shock. Which one got me? No idea.

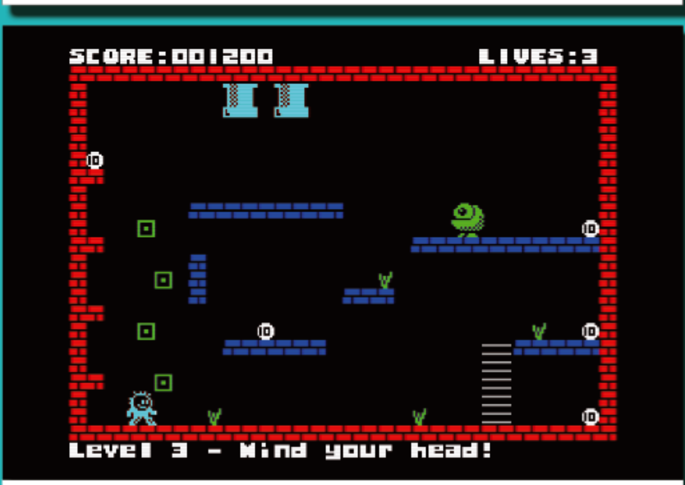
My advice? Save states. Lots of save states. About to jump over a suspicious looking plant? Save. The collision was only a minor irritation in the end. It's clear Steve accounted for these challenges in his level design - it works! The game is tough but fun. Really good fun.

As first games go, this one's a charmer. All of us at Break Space Towers agree - well done Steve. Now take what you've learned and get started on your next game. That covenant you made with your childhood self all those years ago? Consider it fulfilled.



The 'Nice and Easy' level that kept killing me…

Money based games seem to be popular all of a sudden. I guess no one has any real money, so the next best thing is collecting it through the medium of Speccy games, eh? Anyway, this reminds me quite a lot of Jonathan Cauldwell's original Egg Head game, except the implementation on the sprite engine is better. It's a common-or-garden platformer, so nothing too original, just solid gaming joy in wonderful 8-bits. A simple thumbs up from me!



..and a later level that I breezed through

Not content with just releasing one game, Steve has released two - Charlie Far's Vimto Quest is the same game as this one, but reskinned to depict his mate Charlie collecting bottles of booze. A touching personal tribute, I'm sure. If you've been affected by addiction issues as depicted in this box-out…Oops. Out of space!

The Last Bullet

Mananuk

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44140

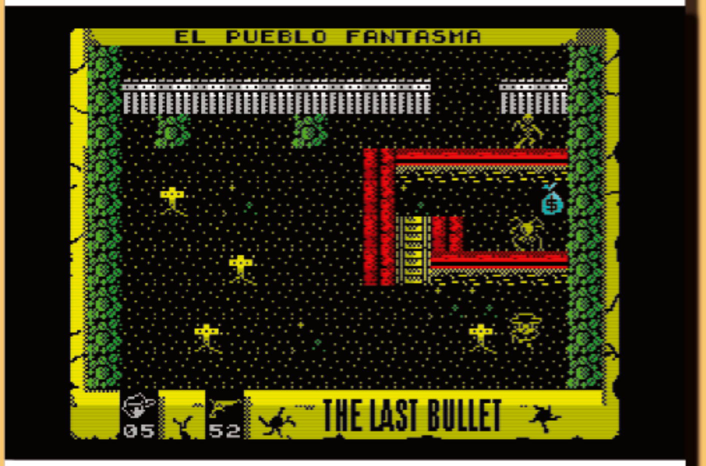
PWYW / €2

This is a top-down, Western-themed action-puzzle game built using the C-based MT Engine MK2.

You play as a cowboy navigating northward through the first level to locate dynamite, all while evading skeletons and spiders. Once acquired, you retrace your steps to the starting point and use the dynamite to blast open a mine entrance.

While dodging enemies, you can also shoot them—though ammunition is limited. Scattered pickups provide occasional resupplies, but conserving bullets is crucial. The optimal strategy often involves avoiding weaker foes and saving firepower for unavoidable threats.

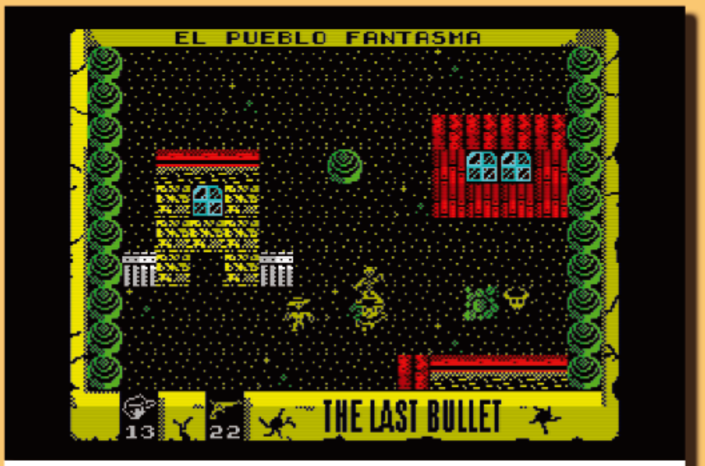
The second level adopts a less linear structure, featuring interconnected sub-levels where key items must be located.



A money spider, yesterday.

The game strikes a satisfying balance. Its varied visuals and steady progression kept me engaged, while its well-tuned difficulty—challenging, but not too hard —encouraged steady advancement. I find many top-down games suffer from convoluted maze layouts, but The Last Bullet avoids this pitfall. Its streamlined design is just linear enough to let players focus on action and puzzles.

During my first attempt, I progressed deep into Level 2 before my health dwindled dangerously low, forcing me to rely heavily on combat. I met my demise seconds after firing my final bullet— a fitting end.



Say, I can see right through your ribs, partner.

Right, so fantasy scenario time. If I was to make a movie, it'd definitely be a Zombie Cowboy SciFi Documentary Comedy Drama thing. Meshing together so many genres would be a challenge and clearly a genius film that works in my head. So, I was really happy when The Last Bullet landed, as it vicariously uses some of my ideal film ideas and turns them into a nifty game, at least the Zombie Cowboy bit. (I'm not sure if that's the right use of the word vicariously, but if it is, it makes me sound more cleverer).

The Last Bullet is a flip-screen shooter with a Zombie Cowboy vibe, mixed with some exploration and maze-type elements. You play as Paleto Jones, the most Spanish Welsh man in the New World, an adventurer and all-around top shooter. Returning home, he finds his village deserted and eerie, its inhabitants kidnapped. As the last man standing (well, except for a shady dynamite dealer - more on him in a bit), it's up to you to rescue them. Off you go, you hero you.

The gameplay hooks you with some neat mechanics. Manic roaming spiders and rising undead Zombies and Skeletons can be taken out with one shot if you're close enough, but from a distance, you'll burn through your limited bullet supply. This is a cracking touch, nudging you to take risks and get up close to your mortal foes when ammo's low. Enemies also respawn after you dispatch them, so you've got to move fast.

Your first task is to scrounge up enough dollars to buy dynamite from the dealer, who, by the way, doesn't give a toss about the Zombie apocalypse - only cold, hard cash matters to him (maybe he's a Ferengi, sneaking in that SciFi bit I dream about). Oh, and apparently, cats don't care either, so I guess being the spawn of Satan has its perks (sorry, cat lovers).

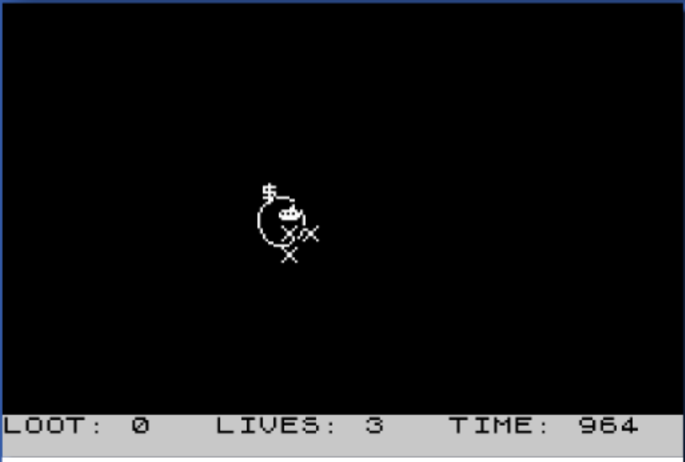
This game is fun, and easy to pick-up. The world is big enough to demand some exploration and learning, and it moves nicely. The sprites and color scheme - mostly yellow on black, like classic Spectrum games - fit the North American desert setting perfectly. I like the balance of play, though it can trick you into losing energy when there's no need to rush, as there's no time limit. Your lives are more like an energy counter - you don't actually die until it's fully spent. Go download it now, I say. It's ace!

Sonar

Fransouls, Kerl, Snorkers

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44321

Free



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LOOT: 0    LIVES: 3    TIME: 964
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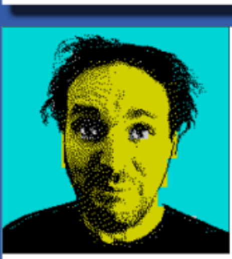
Bad News, Men



One of the great things about gaming in the 1980s - for me at least - was those pages of type-in programmes featured in publications such as Input and other magazines of the era.

The fun was often working out the bugs, especially if one could do this whilst entering the (usually BASIC) listing into the computer's memory. Sonar reminds me very much of this era of gaming, which is almost a lost art in today's world.

First off, being entirely BASIC, this game works on a Speccy with just 16KB of RAM (of course, not all BASIC will). Don't expect any bells and whistles. In fact, in-game graphics are the most simple you could get without using only the characters available by default in the Sinclair ROM; a one-character representation of a submarine is the only eye candy, aside from the circle that is drawn around the ship when you use the Sonar. There is a time limit to make things more interesting, and you are tasked with finding treasure from the depths of an ocean whilst avoiding dangerous reefs.

Your only guide is your trusty sonar radar, revealing what's close by your sub. This doesn't work at the top row of the screen, nor does it seem to work on the bottom two rows either.

So, my initial guess was that these are safe areas, and you can work top to bottom, or vice versa. But this is not the case; you are completely blind in these areas. The sonar will only reveal a very small area around you too, so use it often. The game ends when your time runs out, you have all of the treasure, or you lose all of your three lives.

Sonar is a simple joy that people of a certain age will appreciate, and it's not pretending to be anything else. The fact that you have to wait a short while for the level to generate (of which there is only one), and that there is a pause whilst the BASIC is interpreted after you die too, kind of adds to the nostalgia for me. You may also break the listing and review the source to see how the magic is happening (and also add in your own cheats and stuff too).

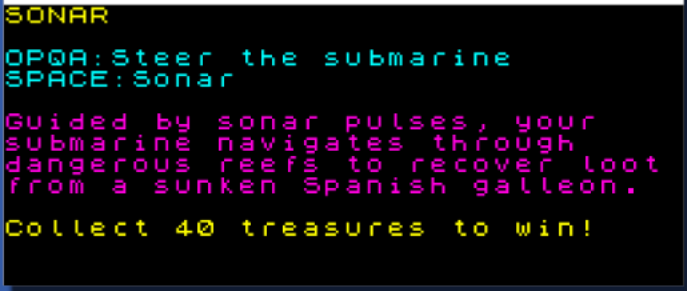
Go get it and relive the days when full games would be printed in your favourite magazines. You know you want to!

(Can you guess which keys you need to hold to to break into the listing? There's a clue on the cover of this issue! - Ed)

Yep this would have been a top type-in. We would have leafed through Sinclair Programs, skipping over things like 'Algebra Maze' in search of an action game with a short listing and a good illustration. Sonar is all these things. I can picture the cartoon now: a bathysphere shrouded in darkness, in the window is a man sweating, eyes bulging and straining to their extremities. There would have been billowing blades of kelp, a sea serpent, and other things that don't actually appear in the game.

Sonar is a neat idea utilising the CIRCLE command as a sonic pulse, to highlight the totally black squares surrounding the player. Against the time limit, you must avoid the mines (X) and collect the treasure ($), fresh from a sunken Spanish galleon. The original release was mostly silent, but subsequent versions and a little teamwork resulted in a 128K version with a beautiful AY PINGggggg.

The gameplay is a bit flawed, as there is not much you can do in the time limit other than methodically move a square, do a pulse, repeat. Enhancements could include: a 'quick reveal' at the start, and placing other items on the screen to give clues to the surroundings. These are things the player could add themselves, which is all part of the fun. And yes, I did change line 70 from INK 0 to INK 6. Don't pretend you didn't.

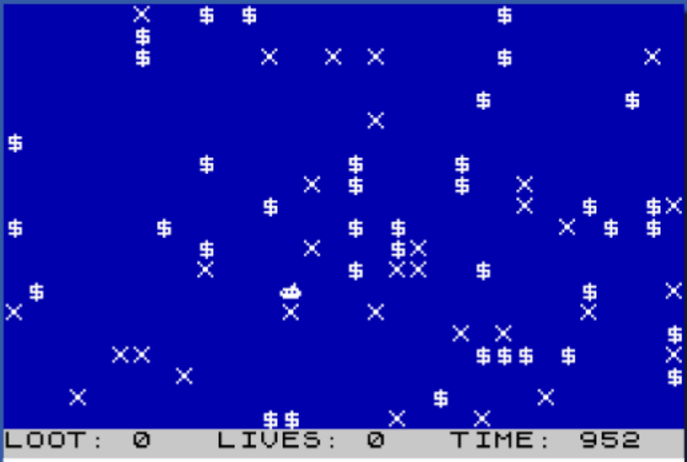


```
SONAR

OPQA:Steer the submarine
SPACE:Sonar

Guided by sonar pulses, your
submarine navigates through
dangerous reefs to recover loot
from a sunken Spanish galleon.

Collect 40 treasures to win!
```



```
LOOT: 0    LIVES: 0    TIME: 952
```

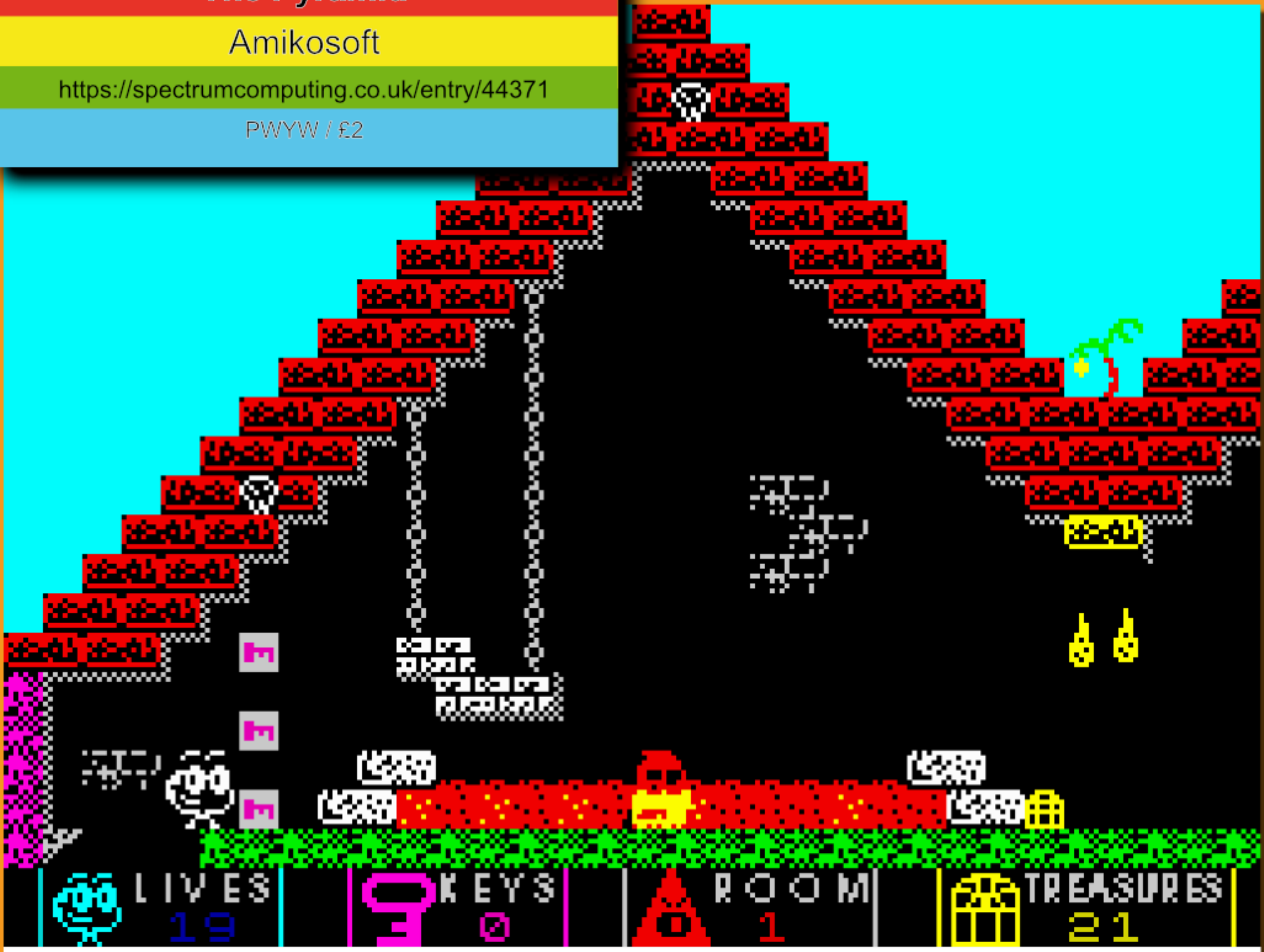
The big reveal

The Pyramid

Amikosoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44371

PWYW / £2



Open plan, freehold property, 2 chains

It's great to see so many new authors coming to the Spectrum, largely due to the proliferation of convenient game making tools.

Amikosoft's first release is an arcade adventure inspired by Dinamic's 1985 Spanish staple 'Abu Simbel Profanation'. It has a lot in common with any flip-screen game, but you can certainly see the graphical nods to it.

The Pyramid is 128K only, using the extra memory banks for music and splash screens. As far as I can see the game engine is all in main memory, so a 48K option would have been nice. Having said that, all my real hardware is broken anyway so who's bothered about such details when you're using emulation.

It strangely pleases me to see little imperfections like the music ON/OFF key on the opening screen. It isn't debounced, so you either have to tap it faster than electrons vibrate, or hold it down and take pot luck that you get the setting you want on release. It's like a game within a game—Joffa would have been proud. Should you choose to have the AY music, it fits the adventure game theme nicely.

You play archaeologist Amisko Jones, and physically you have more in common with a bloated Minion than an intrepid adventurer. Nevertheless, that doesn't stop you entering long-forgotten tombs to learn their history, and pilfer treasures along the way.

Like all fictional ancient Egyptian tombs, it's incredibly well defended—safer than Geoff Capes' budgies. I seem to be forever saying how hard games are, but it's never truer than with The Pyramid. It doesn't quite have Danterrifik* levels of cruelty, but it's not far off. It requires good choreography, timing, and above all patience.

You can't even trust the ground you walk on: many solid blocks are fake and can be passed through. In places this forms a secret passageway to a treasure trove, and in others an unexpected fall, usually to your death. So the 20 lives you get isn't a lot, and In My Hackers Opinion, completing it with infy lives isn't cheating.

---

*by TOKUSoft 2020, it has to be played to be believed.

Where do I even begin with The Pyramid? It's a glorious hot mess—a game that defies logic yet somehow works. Take the loading screen: abstract blocks, like fractured pixels of an alien dream, assemble into a pyramid. It's pure Monet—chaotic brushstrokes up close, yet a cohesive mirage from afar. The closer you look, the less sense it makes… and yet, it's weirdly beautiful.

Then the game itself: 'Brutal' doesn't cover it. Your 20 lives are soon worn away by its rock-hard design, which leans heavily on trial-and-error — a recipe for frustration.

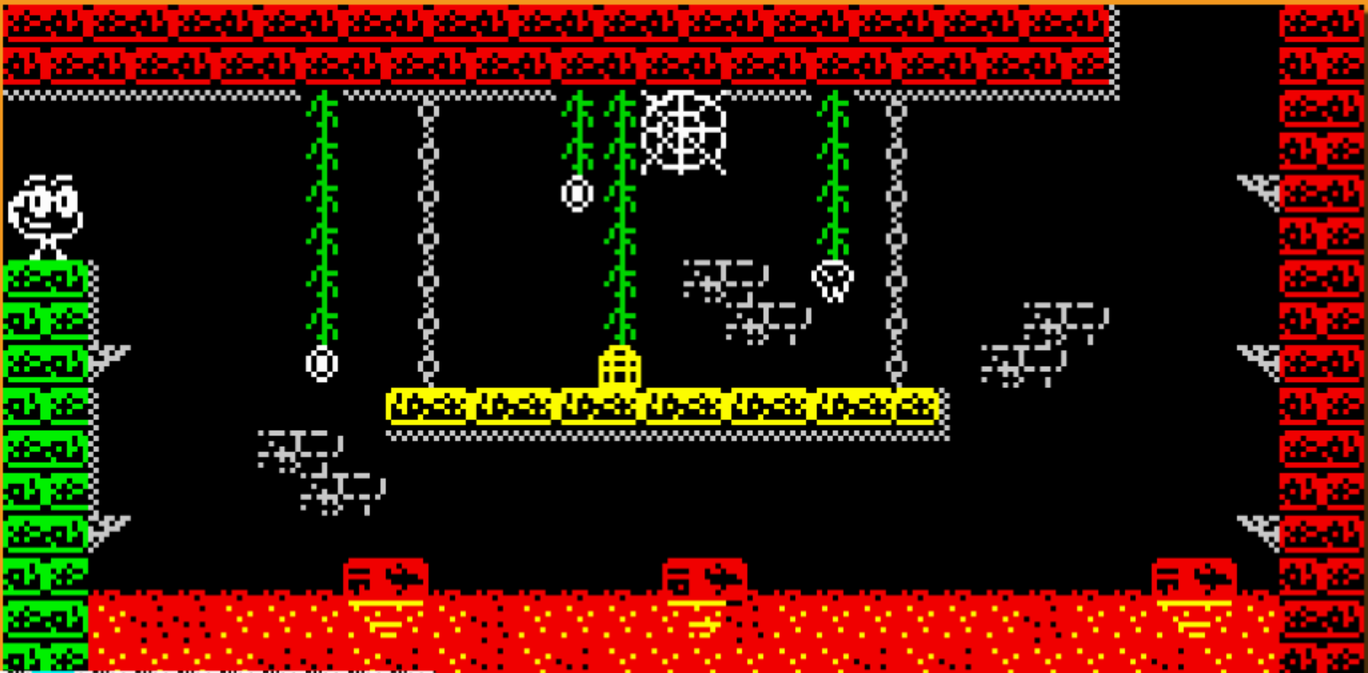
Graphically, though? It's got charm. Your tiny legged, armless sprite compensates with a head oozing personality, and the trippy levels hold your interest… until physics glitch: sprites phase through walls. Enemies patrol rigid squares over triangular platforms—a jarring clash of logic and art.

Then there's the color bleed: Some enemies leave spectral afterimages that hijack your hue without warning. One moment you're white on black, the next, you're blood red and revealing the game's unnecessary lack of polish.

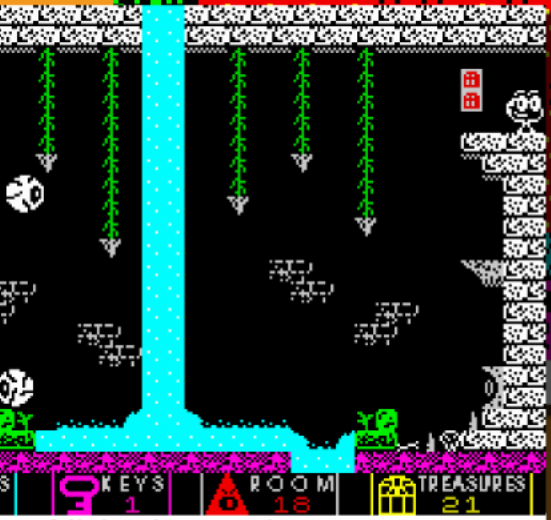
And yes—it's punishing. Dave's right: 20 lives feel like a cruel joke.

But then… something shifted. I surrendered. Stopped fighting its chaos and embraced the weird. The trial-and-error morphed into puzzle-solving. Each screen became a mystery: What surreal landscape awaits next? Slowly, grudgingly, The Pyramid won me over. Its jank? Part of the charm. Its difficulty? A perverse badge of honor.

By the end, I wasn't just tolerating it—I was interested, I was engaged. Beyond the glitches and rage-quit potential lies a game with strange, stubborn soul. So glad I pushed past first impressions. This pyramid? It's a ruin worth exploring.



Lava central heating



Minimal water damage

Thoroughly Modding Willy

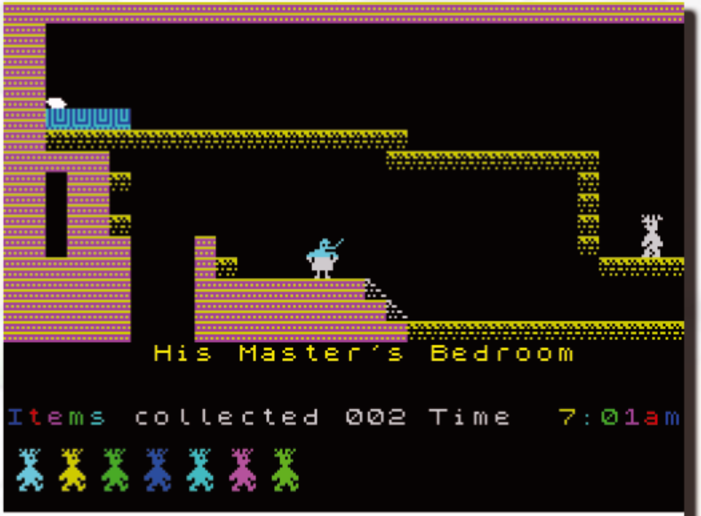
Dave takes a long hard look at the alternate universe that is Jet Set Willy mods, from the 1980s through to today.

Have a guess how many Jet Set Willy mods there have been. I asked the same question of the Break Space team, and between us our answers ranged from 180 to 300. Mine was the highest (and furthest from the mark), and JB won with the lowest. It turns out there are currently one hundred & twenty five JSW mods in ZXDB. If these inflated guesses suggest that ‘it feels more’, I can assure you that doesn’t reflect my feelings about this eccentric enclave of Speccy development.

Either way, 125 is still a lot, and that will only be finalised games that we know of. There’ll be a legion of unfinished and never released projects sitting on hard drives and cassettes, as JSW modding tools were first published in 1985, less than a year after the original game came out.

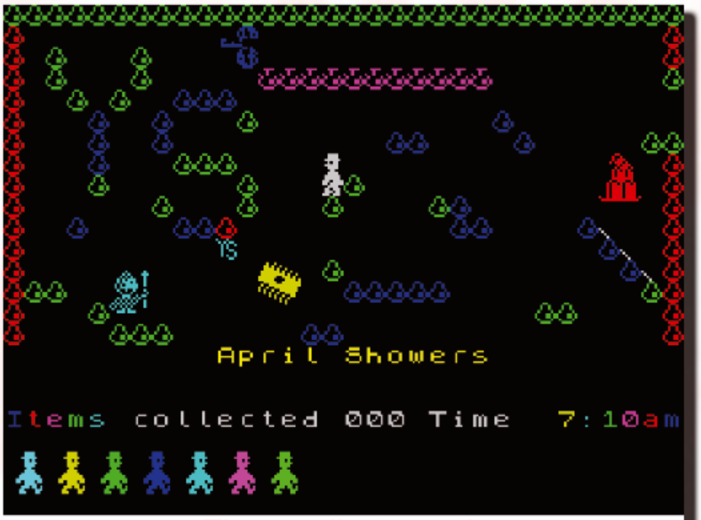
Early game editors ran on the Spectrum and have user interfaces that anyone familiar with AGD would recognise. They have imaginative names like “Jet Set Willy Editor”. Front runners were these publishers and authors: Softricks, Spectrum Electronics, Mark Jeffries and P&M Software. For £3.50 or so, they allowed you to tinker with graphics, sprites and room designs. You would of course need your own copy of JSW (and code sheet, ahem) to set the changes into.

One of the earliest published mods was by Mark Jeffries and released in Spectrum Computing #12 in Jan 1985, alongside his JSW Editor. In it, Willy sports a new haircut and Maria has been transformed into a pipe smoking Grandpa. Most of the graphics have been changed, but it has a similar map & structure to the original.



Unusual Feng Shui

An early well-known mod was ‘Jet Set Willy: April Showers’’, a Your Spectrum magazine type-in that patched JSW to give it a hidden room. It was in part an April Fool gag, but the patch was very real and I can confirm that it works, and that the room is at the top of a rope climb at The Beach (and is very hard!).

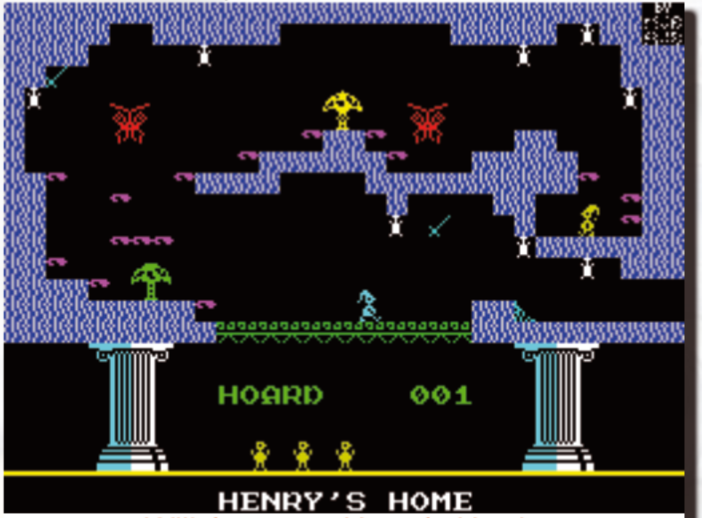


The cruellest month

Using these tools, we saw a spike in JSW modding activity during the mid 80s, which faded by 1986.

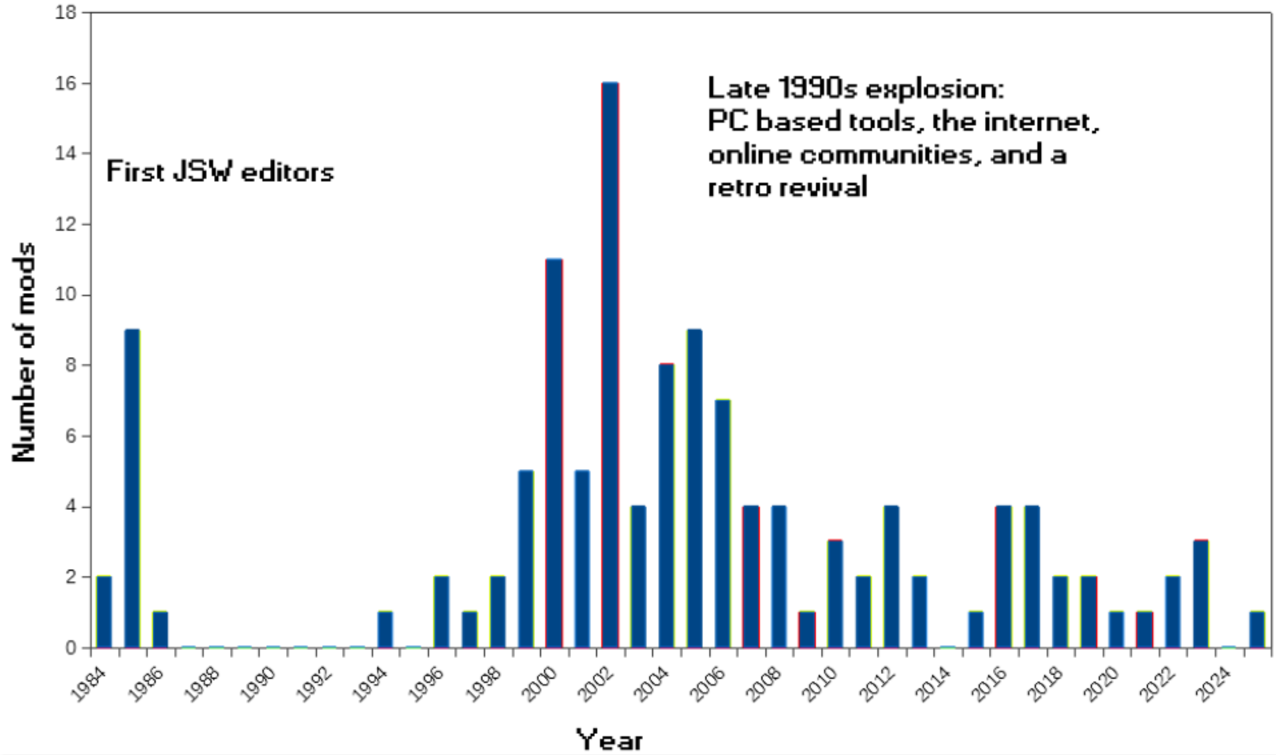
Being pre-internet and pre-scene, there must have been a lot of unseen activity by people just enjoying tinkering, with no ability nor interest in sharing their doodles more widely. Some of these resurfaced decades later, such as Richard Hallas’s “Join The Jet Set!”, though many will have been lost.

An outlier from the time is Henry’s Hoard, cheekily released commercially in 1985 using a heavily hacked JSW engine.



Willy’s, sorry, *Henry*’s Horde

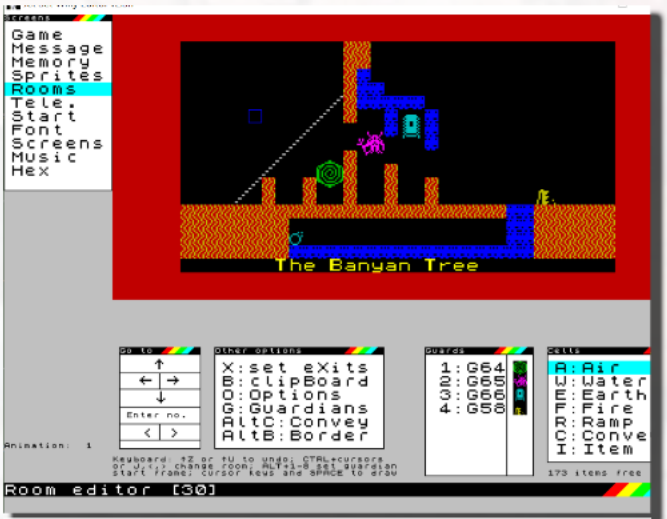
This went unnoticed by the world at large until Phil Bee spotted it in 2000, which is testament to how much scrutiny JSW has seen in the modern era. Every nook and cranny of the code has been put under the magnifying glass, now visible to all in online disassemblies.



JSW mods through the years

Time passed. People got jobs. Went to Uni. Fell in love. *(Speak for yourself - Ed)* Spectrums went to the loft, or the car boot, and Willy never saw much action for the best part of a decade. But then, from the mid-late 90s, a confluence of the internet, PCs & PC based tools, emulators and a retro revival, lead to a proliferation of JSW mods and online communities.

Instrumental in this was John Eliot's JSWED, a PC based utility for making JSW mods. Version 1 came out in 1997, and a lot of updates followed until 2015. It's easy to use and has a lot of options: change block and sprite graphics, modify rooms, maps, have Manic Miner style properties, extra blocks, extra sprites, extra rooms. These days it's the go-to tool, with versions of it capable of producing single screen games like Clopit! to 256 room epics like 'Where's Woody?'.


Game
Message
Memory
Sprites
Rooms
Tele.
Start
Font
Screens
Music
Hex
The Banyan Tree
Go to
Enter no.
Other options
X:set eXits
B:clipBoard
O:Options
G:Guardians
AltC:Convey
AltB:Border
Guards
1:G64
2:G65
3:G66
4:G58
Cells
A:Air
W:Water
E:Earth
F:Fire
R:Ramp
C:Conve
I:Item
Animation: 1
173 items free
Room editor [30]

Keyboard: ↑Z or ↑U to undo; CTRL+cursors or J,<,> change room; ALT+1-8 set guardian start frame; cursor keys and SPACE to draw

JSWED running on a PC

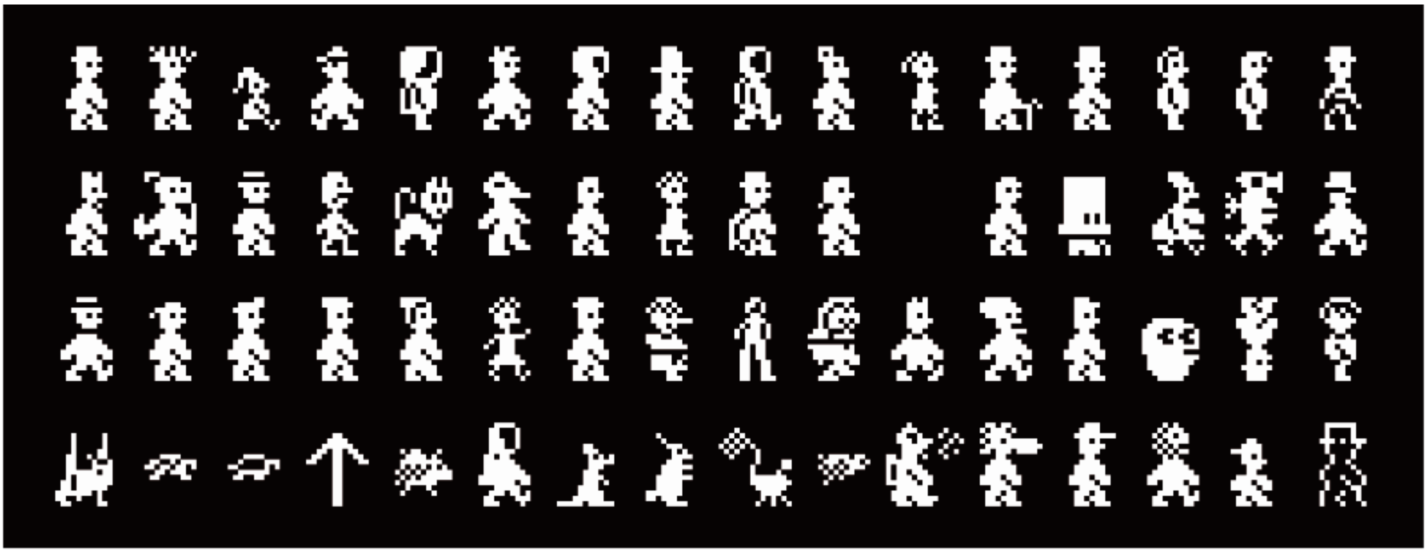
Over the years, there's been a great diversity of JSW games, and while there are always blurred lines, I would class them like this:

Player games. Basically fan games that are a tribute and continuation of the humour and whimsy of the original JSW. Their focus is on making a fun game with their own twist on it. These are what most of us think of as JSW mods. And while there are so many, some that stand out for me are 'Maria Vs Some Bastards' and 'Willy: The Man Who Sold The World'.

Advanced player games. These are a subset of the above, and are not for wimps. They require lots of experience playing, and often detailed knowledge of JSW's quirks. For example Andrew Broad's 'Goodnite Luddite', or arguably Ghosts of Willy, which we review right after this piece.

Technical mods. These are codes hacks or ways of exploiting quirks of the game, and can be as little as changing a few bytes. For example John Eliot's 'Jet Set Wibble', which is an upside down JSW, made by tweaking the code, rather than modding the map.

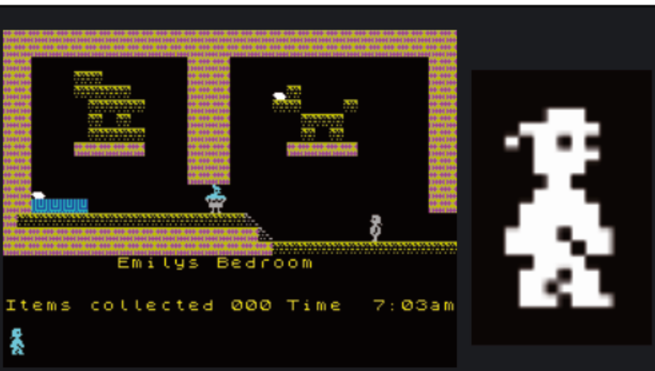
Bugfixes. It's not just the Attic Bug—there's a litany of glitches, large & small, from guardian colour halos to invisible items. The most comprehensive is probably MetalMickey's 'JSW : As Manufacturer Intended', which claims to fix every known bug.



The many faces of Willy

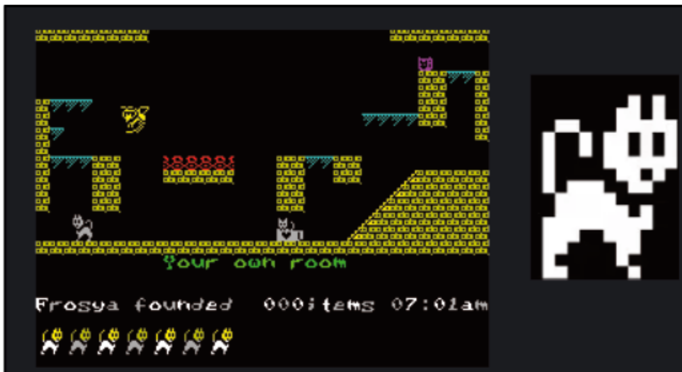
Willy has had many forms and stand-ins over the years as you can see above.

Some of them may need explanation.


Emilys Bedroom

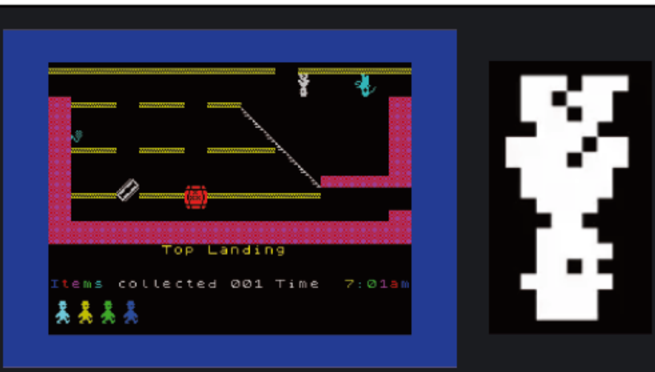
Items collected 000 Time 7:03am

In Jet Set Emily from 2006, young Emily can't go to bed without cleaning up the mess she made.


Your own room

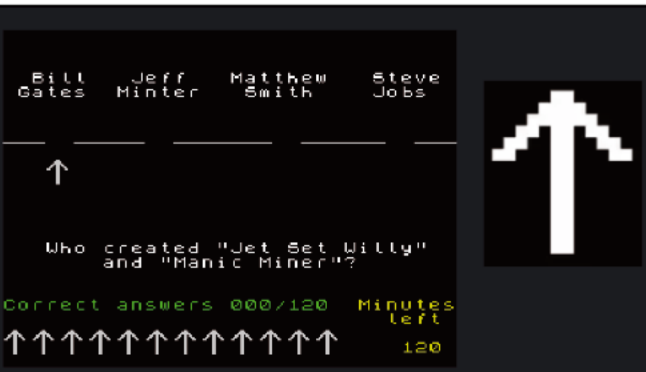
Frosya founded 000items 07:01am

In Jet Cat Frosya from 2002, Frosya the cat must collect 255 tasty treats to pay the ransom on her kidnapped kittens


Top Landing

Items collected 001 Time 7:01am

In Jet Set Wibble everything's upside down. Best not to ask why.


Bill Gates

Jeff Minter

Matthew Smith

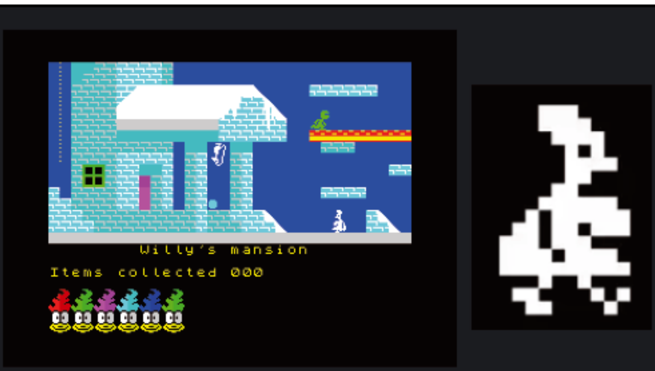
Steve Jobs

Who created "Jet Set Willy" and "Manic Miner"?

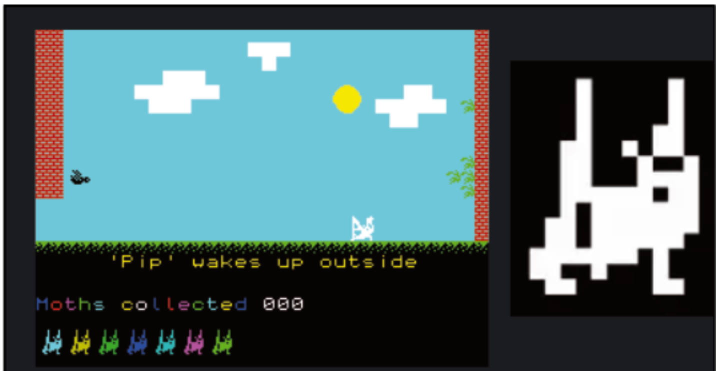
Correct answers 000/120

Minutes left 120

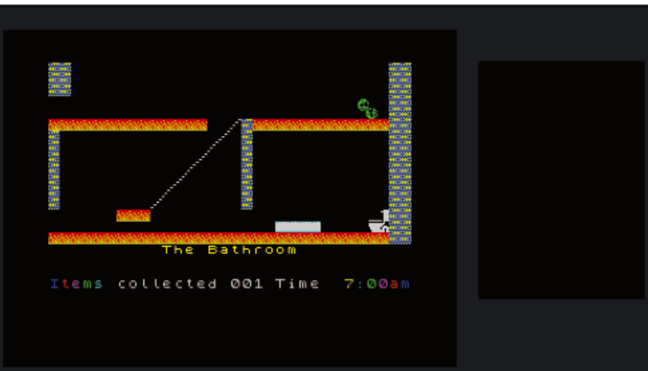
Yes, it's a quiz. Yes, it's a JSW mod. Willy Games : The First 30 Years Quiz, to be specific.



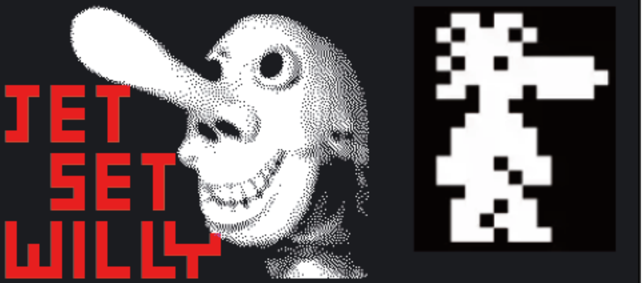
Maria gets a starring role in Maria vs. Some Bastards



It took me a while to see it, but that's a bat : Pip the Pipistrelle, to be precise, who's up way past their bedtime.



The Invisible Man renders Willy as, well, invisible. Because of how JSW collision detection works, he can't be killed, but you also can't see where he is. Problematic.



Oh, God, it's Noseybonk

The online community that sprang from the early comp.sys.sinclair and Yahoo! groups is particularly impressive. Nowadays things are consolidated at Jet Set Willy & Manic Miner Community and JSW Central, and if you really want a deep dive, they are the places to go.

It's very encouraging to see a busy community of enthusiasts—fixing bugs, developing games and preserving info. With these nutters at the helm, Willy can be assured that he'll continue being poked and prodded for some time to come.

Links

The JSW encyclopaedia
https://jswcentral.org/index.html

Jet Set Willy & Manic Miner Community
https://jswmm.co.uk/

Jet Set Willy Central
https://jswcentral.org/

Disassembly
https://skoolkit.ca/disassemblies/jet_set_willy/

Facts
https://skoolkit.ca/disassemblies/jet_set_willy/reference/facts.html

Bugs
https://skoolkit.ca/disassemblies/jet_set_willy/reference/bugs.html

Central Cavern - The Wonderful World of Willy
https://www.facebook.com/groups/centralcavern

Henry's Hoard uncovered
https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/comp.sys.sinclair/zWxXUWoDYrc/3-tdFj9QpxgJ

Ghost of Willy

CaRL PaTeRSoN

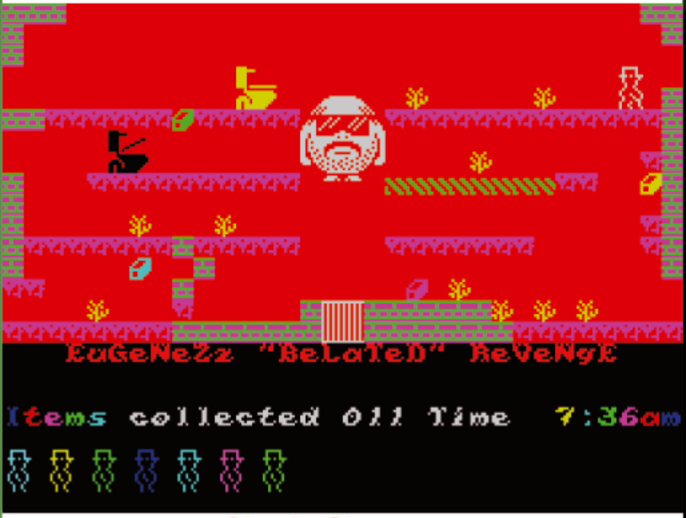
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44391

Free

Author CaRL PaTeRSoN is fond of using deranged-looking combinations of letters, and making actually-deranged mods of Jet Set Willy. This one follows on from his 'Jet Set Junior' where Pharaoh Maria curses the whole family, turning Willy into a ghost. To return to human form, he must collect all the sacred relics and take them to the Altar of Maria.

I could have done without the seizure-inducing flashing and slow scroller interrupting the loader, but what follows is much better and is slightly less hazardous to health. I say 'slightly' because just from reading the provided info you'll see why—when the instructions recommend playing with an infinite lives POKE, it's a safe bet that it'll be harder than Wolverine's conkers!

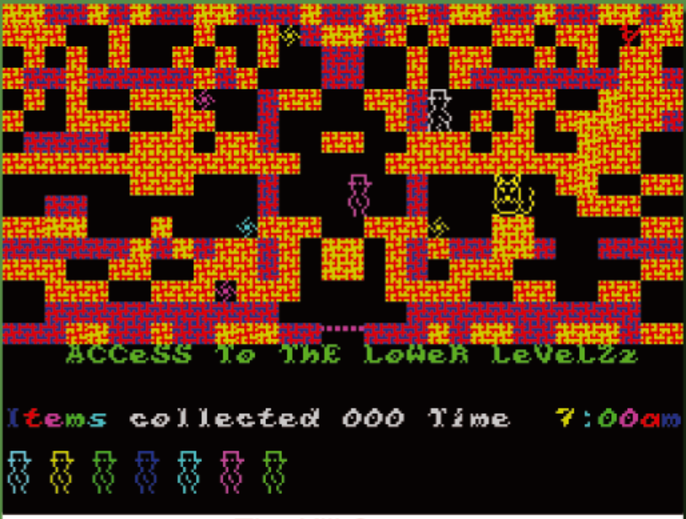
And that is what it is. The first screen is a mish-mash of blocks resembling the Pacman kill screen, and you have to find your way through them with trial and error. There are invisible deadly blocks, there are deadly blocks resembling solid blocks, it seems there are deadly blocks everywhere. Rooms after this are a bit more sensible, but some SC forum members found the start too unplayable to bother looking beyond it. This will not come as a surprise to Carl, because 'cruelly difficult' is practically a sub-genre of MM/JSW mod, as started by Andrew Broad in the late 90s. Look at 'Ma Jolie' for example, which screams "GIVE UP WEAKLING!" at you from the off.



Shady Character

It is worth persevering though, because there are treats to be found. The spirit Willy sprite is very cleverly drawn. All the screens have personality, and there are nods to other classic characters like Eugene, Hunchback and 'Honker' from Manic Miner. Each room is a little puzzle that can be solved, and you'll notice your platforming-fu go up a few notches if you apply yourself.

It's recommended to save 3 lives for the final rooms, so there's probably a surprise at the end. I never got far enough to find out (and in all likelihood, unless your name is Carl Paterson, neither will you). This is one for the JSW savants, and if you don't already know if you are one or not, then Ghost of Willy will help you decide. But there's more: if you email the author with the correct number of birds seen in the game, you win a Chomp™. If that's not incentive to try, I don't know what is.

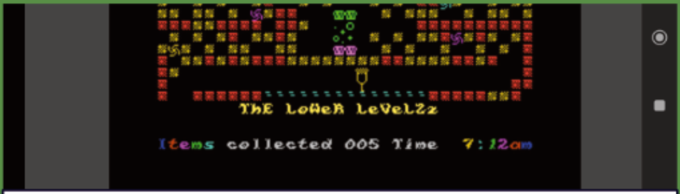


The Kill Screen

Imagine, if you will, that you are in a maze. The walls are tight and spiky. Every direction looks the same—that is to say, like a cat was sick on some William Morris wallpaper. One false move and you're dead. But what is a false move, and what is the true path? This crucial question remains unanswered as you tumble and fall again and again, trying to make sense of the trap that confuses and confounds you at every turn, all the while burning through your precious stock of limited lives.

This is how it felt to play Ghost of Willy's opening three levels. The game is hard and uncompromisingly impenetrable. But, like all the JSW games, it draws me in like a moth to a flame. I want to play this game; I want to get good at it. Every time I see a new mod, I hope that this one will be my way in. On one hand, Ghost of Willy might have done that for me. The opening levels feel linear. Each room seems to have a single exit, and I like that because the 'open world' nature of JSW is daunting. At least with GOW, the decision is already made for me—at least in the early levels, which were all I was able to complete.

The weird thing is, I feel so compelled to play JSW games and love them. Even the original hasn't lost any of its mystique in the last 40-odd years. But meaningful progress eludes me, even in the original. The games are just hard and weird—which is what's good about them. So, GOW is one for the genre aficionados. I guess I belong in the shallows, playing Manic Miner. Spiky cat-sick mazes? Leave those for the experts!



Jamie insisted that we provide proof that he's made it to Level 2

Sam Fox Pin Up Poker

DF Design

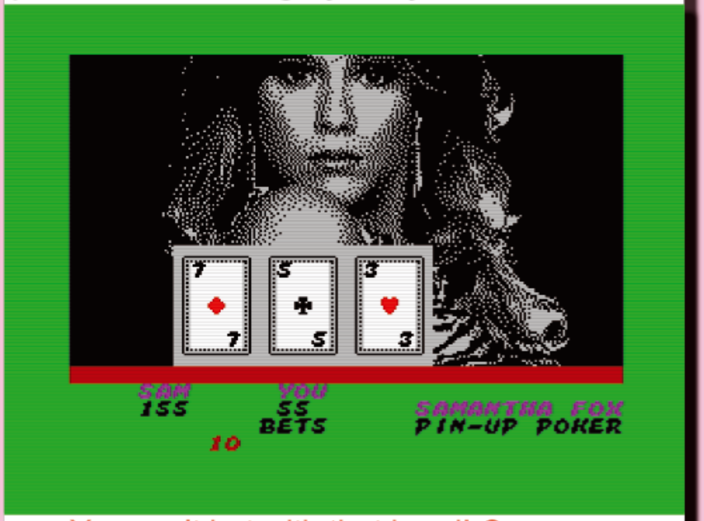
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44413

PWYW / £2

I creep past my wife, face flushed, clutching a ZX Spectrum hidden in a crumpled brown paper bag. With the furtive grace of a man smuggling contraband, I slip into my study, quietly shut the door, and boot up Sam Fox Pin Up Poker. The stakes? My dignity.

Discretion, alas, is not this game's strong suit. DF Design clearly missed the memo - Sam Fox Pin Up Poker announces itself with all the subtlety of a fire alarm. The Spectrum screeches, blips, and boops its way through digitized wolf whistles and jaunty casino tunes, loudly broadcasting exactly what kind of poker I'm playing. I place my first bet, already sweating.

Did keen poker-player Clive Sinclair ever sit across the table from Sam Fox? History is silent on the matter. But I like to imagine a secret high-stakes game that brought down an empire -Thatcher's government hastily blaming the C5 for Sinclair's downfall while Alan Sugar swooped in to pick up the pieces. A national tragedy, really.



You can't bet with that hand! Come on.

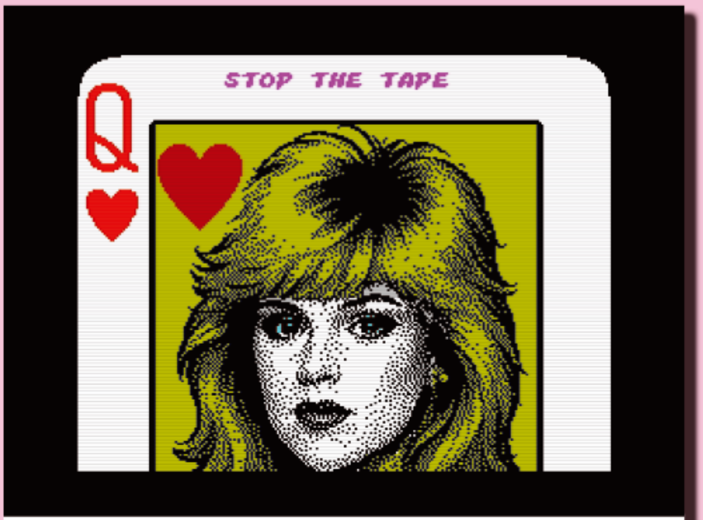
Presentation-wise, the game punches above its weight. The artwork is sharp, the tunes are catchy, and the cheeky little animations give it personality. Whether you'll enjoy it depends entirely on two things:

1. Your tolerance for rudimentary poker mechanics.

2. Your nostalgia for 80s Page 3 glamour.

On that second point, I'm out of my depth - I was barely old enough to hold a joystick when Sam Fox first graced The Sun's notorious third page. (Side note: She was only Sixteen? Good lord, the 80s were a different time.)

Sam Fox Pin Up Poker knows exactly what it is - a cheeky, slightly naughty dose of nostalgia that winks at you from across the decades. All fur coat and no knickers? Yes, but isn't that the point?



The real Queen of our Hearts. Take that, Daily Mail.

Oo-err! If any review in history should start with that fabled expression, then it is surely this one. But let's do some back-tracking: back in the day, the publisher Martech made a real splash when it released Samantha Fox Strip Poker in 1986, a game that sold well even if you could have picked up a copy of a tabloid so-called newspaper at the time to see the aforementioned model in all her glory, saving you a few quid in the process. The main market then wasn't the tabloid procuring public, but more likely teenage lads; I wasn't quite a teenager on its release, but I remember my Uncle and my mate buying a copy. And in a grand tribute to this piece of filthy gaming history, DF Designs and Northern Games have released Sam Fox Pin Up Poker; as now a retired teenager, and a Northerner, I thought I'd investigate further.

Firstly, I have to say, there is quite a lot of polish here. It includes sampled speech and quite lovely AY and Beeper music too. The "Pin Ups" are also well pixelated, and the game play is simple enough that anyone will pick it up quickly. Though, it's a cut down version of Poker, in that each player is only dealt three cards. You can bet, call, raise by set amounts or fold. As for swapping cards, you may only do this once.

The aim is to bankrupt your AI opponent in the guise of Samantha Fox herself, who is lovely digitised in 1-bit graphics. Sam has some nice graphical assets when she's out of cash too, as you'll get to see one of her pinups from a collection for each round that you win. There are four game choices with different pin ups to gaze at overall.

I don't often play Poker type games, but never has the phrase "I win with my pair" seemed so apt. And certainly you get a much better representation of Sam's pin ups than Martech's original classic. So, give it a go, it's a simple, easy to understand and a fairly easy to beat stripped down Poker experience.

Sam is 59 years old now, and still touring with her music.

She got married to her tour manager in 2022, and in 2024 was fined £100 for threatening a police officer.

Rock on, Sam.

Baby-Man VS Terminatots

PuttyCAD

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44372

$1.99

It's always fun to play the baddie. It doesn't happen that often in Speccy games, however the latest game in PuddyCAD and 100tinsoldiers' excellent Baby-Man series sees you do just that. Mind you, I did have to read the synopsis about five or six times before I twigged what was actually going on.

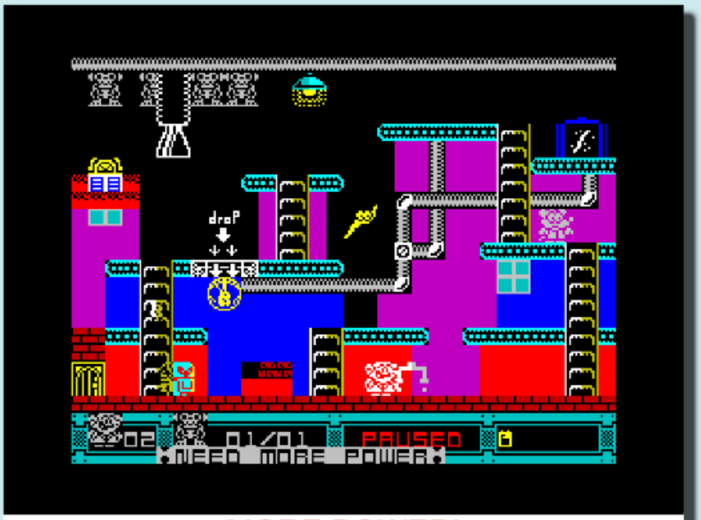
You play the evil Professor D.Hyper, who is building a set of Terminatots to go back in time to stop Baby-Man from defeating his younger self (aka "Man-baby").

In order to succeed with this diabolical plot, you first have to assemble a cyborg from the assorted parts that spew out from the Prof's infernal machine. Standing in your way is an adorable (but deadly) lightning bolt with cartoon eyes and the cutest factory robot since Short Circuit's Johnny 5 rolled off the production line.

Once assembled the next screen sees you running after speedy little hamsters to try and corner the pesky rodents so you can set them to work powering the portal that allows you to send back your evil Terminatot. This time you have a deadly guard bot firing freaking lasers to contend with as well as an annoying lab rat that'll make you drop that hamster that you've just spent an eternity trying to catch!

One deadly killing machine dispatched into the portal and it's on to more complex levels, building & dispatching more cyborgs to add to your army.

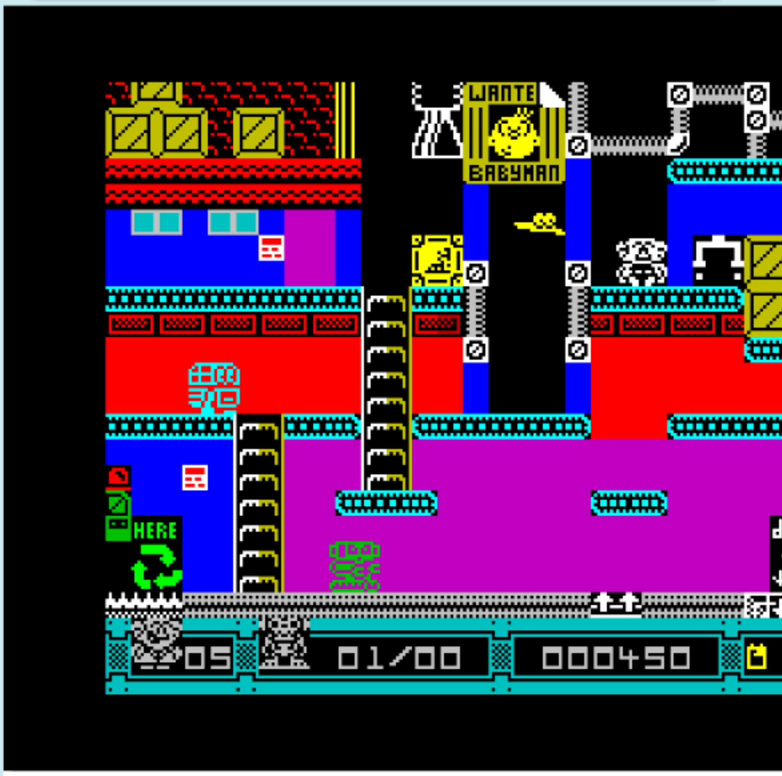
This game is a very welcome return to a fun series after the first two games from a couple of years back. I've loved all of PuddyCAD's games, whether he's working alongside the talented PsychicParrot, Rich Pea or 100tinsoldiers they always pop with character and colour. It's been said before (by me at least) that playing PuddyCAD's games is like stepping into the pages of the Beano and it's true again here.



MORE POWER!

The levels can be challenging but the logic is extremely well thought out and there's a real sense of accomplishment getting each cyborg constructed and shipped. There are loads of really nice touches in the game, such as the Professor taking a break to play videogames if you leave him for too long. It reminds me a lot of Moley Christmas, the superb Your Sinclair Monty Mole game, both in it's graphical style and it's gameplay. For me that counts as high praise, given that I've dug out and enjoyed that game practically every Christmas over the last four decades.

The icing on the cake is that this is billed as part 1, teasing us with the prospect of future installments. I'm already looking forward to the next chapter. "I'll be back", eh? Bring it on.



The Professor's got two left feet

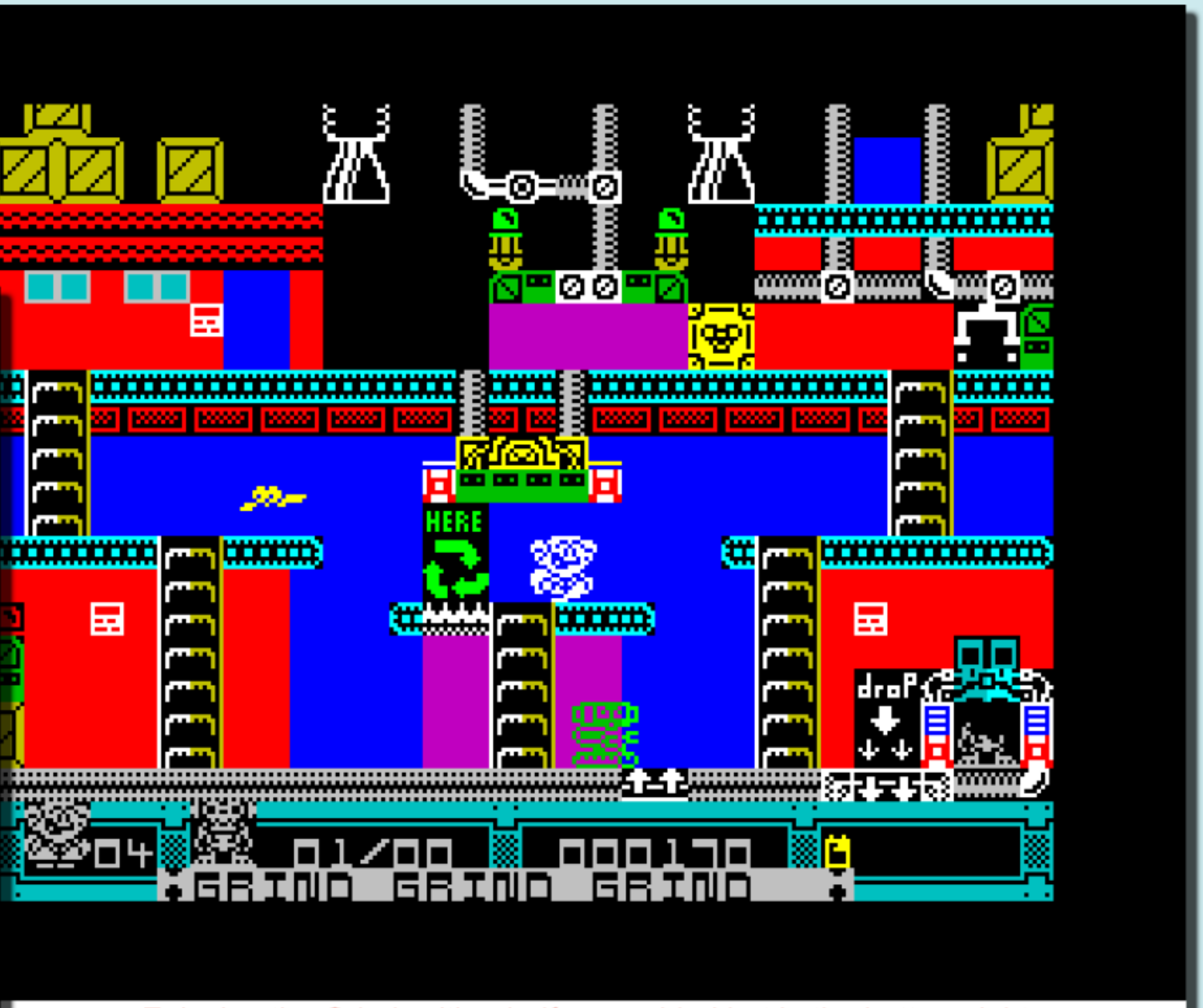
This game reminded me of the Speccy classics Turmoil and Frank'n'Stein, being tasked with assembling something whilst avoid nasties. Each single screen challenge is fun, and there is a huge satisfaction in beating each level. The graphics as colourful and, once you get used to working out which bits of the scenery you can stand on, you'll soon be zipping around the levels building Terminatots from constituent parts and catching hamsters to send them through time. Evocative of catching the mouse in Back 2 Skool, these alternating levels are a nice surprise after the intial pick-up-and-delivery play, and – thanks to some gloriously aggressive enemies – provide a healthy challenge.

I'm a little surprised at the lack of menu screen music or similar on such a high-gloss paid game (albeit only $2) and, in honesty, I'd have preferred 'up' and 'jump' to have been completely distinct when using the keyboard. I do however recognise that up=jump is very much the way-of-the-one-button-joystick, but it can mean that climbing a ladder can inadvertantly finish with in you leaping in the air at the top – something you rarely what you want to do. Despite these nit picks, there's such a lot of fun here - the graphics are great (including a very nice loading screen) and the platforming is tight and pacy. What's not to like?

An oddly sedate platformer, I found. Absolutely perfect, technically, with a nice split in level types between the robot assembly levels and the unique rodent-catching levels. Although it's fast moving, the key is methodical, planned movement. No place for improvisation here!

It looks great as well, a riot of colour with a lot of personality and neat touches.

I've not gotten along with the previous Babyman games, although I do appreciate that each it its own unique thing. This is a thoughtful, smart design that comes together very nicely.



Enjoying the Grind, with a half-assembled bot in the bottom right.

Wartris

Briefer

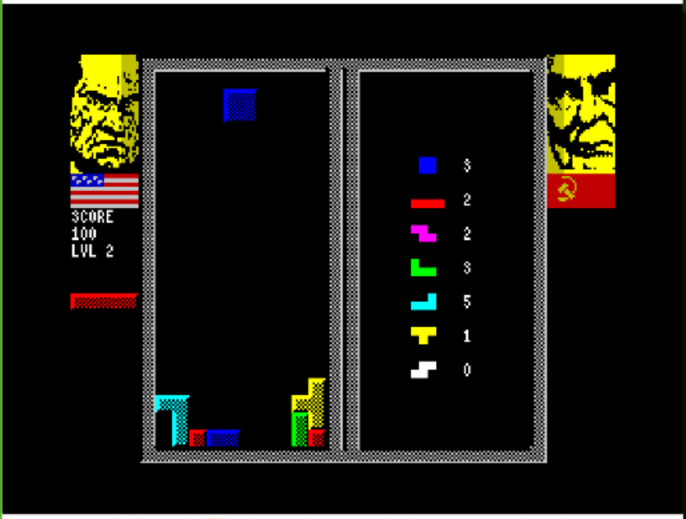
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44232

$2

War[tris]! Huh! Yeah! What is it good for? Well, actually, it's a pretty excellent variant on the famous relic from the Soviet and Cold War era called Tetris, brought to our home computers near to the end of the Cold War era, at least outside of the USSR. Although, considering that the original concept first came about in the mid-1980s, I am surprised to see caricatures of Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev instead of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev when I start up the game. Lovely graphics though.

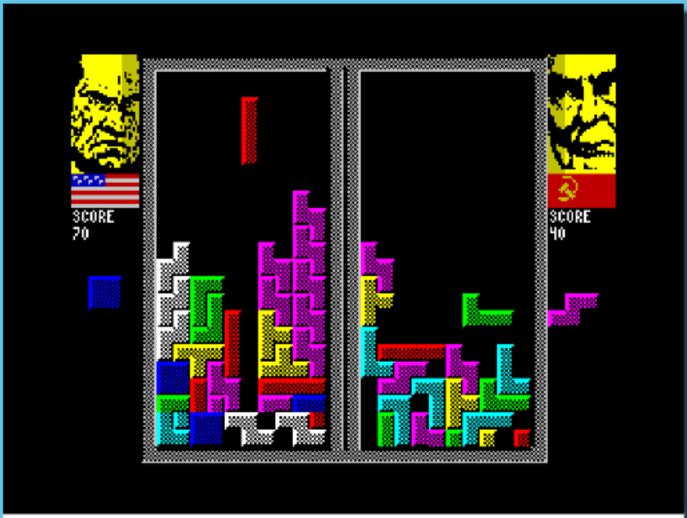
Unless you've been living under a rock, you'll know the drill. But just in case you have, here's the basic premise: you control shapes moving down a well-alike play area that stack in columns, building upwards, and each shape is made up of four square blocks. You must create a solid row by fitting these blocks together, eventually levelling up for each complete row achieved. To get the coveted "Tetris", you need to build up the blocks in a well leaving one column width free of at least four rows. And then wait for the "red" four-blocked rectangle to appear. And sometimes wait. And wait.

So influential was Tetris, and so enshrined in our collective history, that the idea of a game from Russia infiltrating outside of her borders and being utterly addictive inspired a Police Academy movie, Mission to Moscow, but by the time this not great movie was released, the Cold War had officially ended.



Mom! Richard won't let me play!

Anyway, enough tangents. Let's get down to it: Wartris may be played single player, against a human opponent, or even against a computer controlled player two. Unlike other variants, things start out pretty pacey; where I'm used to getting to at least level nine on other versions of this game (particularly the very famous Nintendo Gameboy version), I'm struggling to get past level five. To be fair, after at least 30 years of playing Tetris and many of its clones, it's great to have a challenge again.



Only Nixon could score a 4-liner

The graphics are as good as you'd want from this sort of thing, and there is a rather dour AY sound track that is still audibly very well done. Make Tetris Stacks, not War I say! Wartris is a very good version.

Nicely presented, with leering caricatures on each side and a selection of beeper tunes to choose from (I recommend Track #4), Wartis plays a decent Tetris games.

The single-player mode runs a lot smoother and faster than the head-to-head modes, and gets difficult very quickly. The AI doesn't put up a massive challenge in the slower Vs modes though, so you might want to save those for playing a human opponent.

There are 2 tapes in the package - one supports 1-player and 2-player modes, while the other supports 1-player vs the AI and, for the terminally lazy, AI vs AI. The 2-player mode includes neat attack modes - on completing lines, you get tokens that you can use to mess with your opponent's game. Fun for you, frustrating for them!

I did pick up an occasional bug where pieces didn't drop correctly after sliding, hanging impossibly in the air, and sometimes I felt like the controls were slightly laggy, which is not something I needed when the pace picked up. But it's feature-packed and ambitious Tetris game despite these few minor annoyances.

Build your

Both of these come with source code i

Wartris is developed in Boriel

The Boriel code is nicely laid out and kind of des
if you wanted to teach

Similarly the ASM for ZXetris is commented i
functions. It's maybe not a place to *begin* with AS
but if you have grasped the fundamentals this w
starter exercise, maybe you co

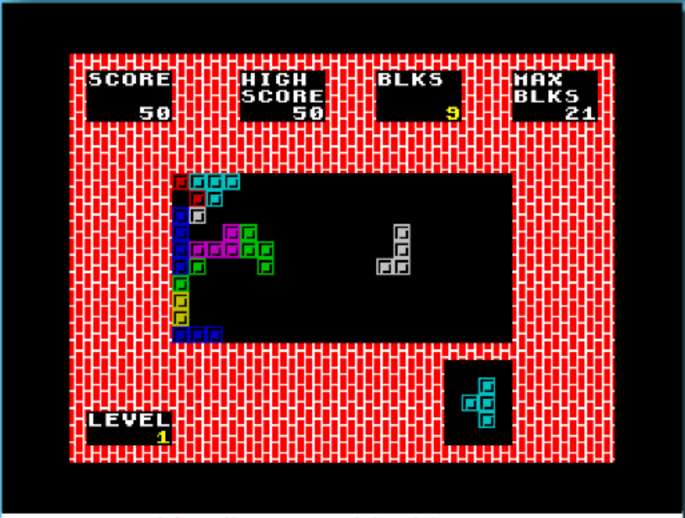
To both developers though, kudos is due for

ZXetris

FPracek

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44239

Free



It's all gone a bit sideways

So we come to the 2nd Tetris game this issue, the hard-to-pronounce ZXetris.

Again, it's Tetris, but single-player only this time, and with somewhat less attractive presentation. On this one, drop just slams the tile down into position, while down on Wartris accelerates the fall, but still allows for manoeuvering. That'll be a matter of personal preference. There are fewer options generally : No in-game music; no multiplayer modes. Just single player with an on-by-default 'Chaos' mode.

At the mention of Chaos mode, I guess some of you (Hi Pete!) are immediately thinking about disbelieving unwanted square pieces and filling your tetris gaps with enchanted forests, but no.

With Chaos mode, the screen will, at seemingly random intervals, flip from the standard vertical Tetris layout to a horizontal or upside-down configuration, the tiles plummeting upwards or sideways. It's fun, and more confusing that you'd think.

Frustratingly though, the left-right keys don't align properly with the flipped directions, which further adds to the annoyance of a plain weird, and not redefinable, key layout. 4 & 6 for left-right, 5 to rotate the tile. An own-goal there, I think.

Still, if I had to choose between these 2 Tetrises, I'd go for this one. It's smooth and responsive and the Chaos mode certainly demands your attention.

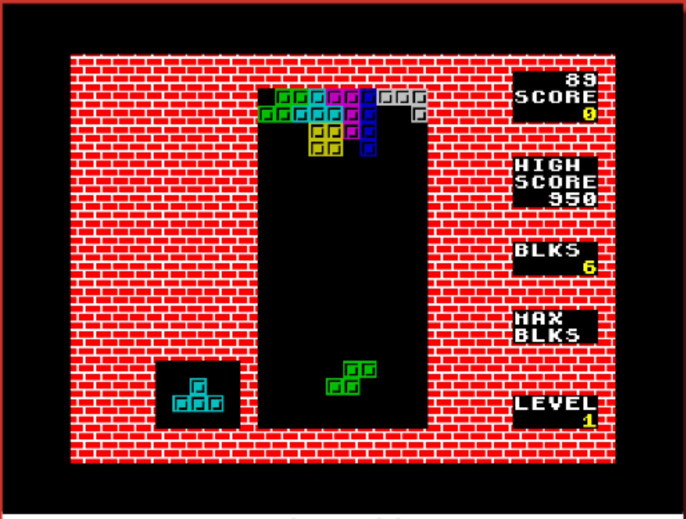
If I were to write another review about a straight Tetris clone on an 8-bit system, it would simply read "this is another Tetris clone". So here I am, and I've already spent more words here than that. But this isn't just another Tetris clone, this is a variant with a twist. Or, more precisely, an about turn. Or something.

We have got a standard, common-or-garden Tetris game at the heart of ZXETRIS. Do I have to explain what the basics of this is all about again? Or may I ask you, dear reader, to skim through my Wartris review? Okay, well, this isn't a polite request now, and if you don't know about Tetris already, what have you been doing with your life? Err… anyway.

Let's start on the best way to play this game, and this is in "Chaos" mode, in which, at random intervals, the playing well is rotated in multiples of 90° left or right, so technically, the "bottom" of the well could be at the top of the screen all of a sudden. But the directional controls don't change with this, or do they? When the well is upside down, left is still left and right is still right. At least, I think it is. When it's on the side however (with the "bottom" of the well being either to the left, or to the right, of the screen), my mind melts a bit, and I can't work out which way is which. Do I rotate my brain to compensate?!?

I do wonder if this is an original idea, or if the game author tried to play Tetris with his Gameboy upside down once? Or, was a TV the wrong way up that time? Who knows.

We have a very good Tetris game with a unique selling point, that you choose which way you want to play it, or you brave the chaos for extra fun. I love it, and I'm sure you will too. So, what are you waiting for, get it loaded. Now!



Aaaagh!

own Tetris

ncluded, which is a commendable step.

BASIC, while ZXetris is in ASM.

scribes itself, and would be a great starting point
yourself that language.

n a lot of detail, and well laid out in bite-sized
SM, which is by its nature a less welcoming beast,
ould be a good example of a larger project. As a
uld change the predefined keys.

allowing everyone to view their methodology.

Operation Moo

JuanGM

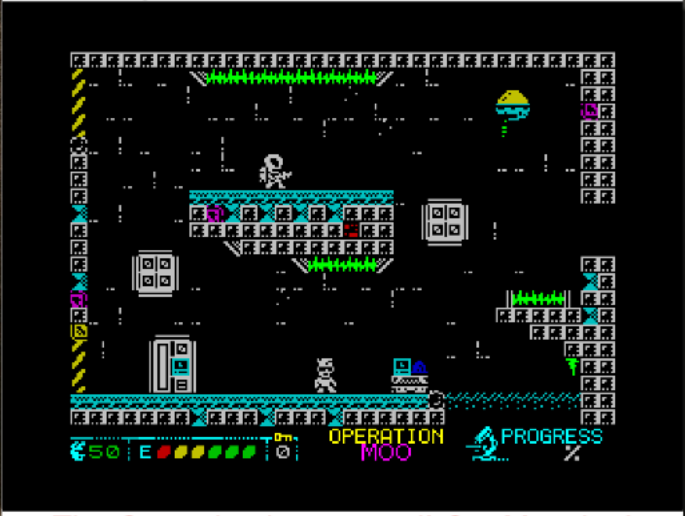
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44300

PWYW / $2

My nostalgia for all things 1980s and 1990s doesn't just include 8-bit games and computers; it's also some television programmes too. Probably unsurprisingly, this includes Science Fiction, such as Star Trek (Deep Space 9 especially), and the X-Files. Hearing a great rendition of the X-Files theme whilst playing the rather brill Operation Moo took me back to my student days.

To the game then: this is an explorer type flip-screen world in which you, a well-armed and jet-pack powered hero, must rescue the abducted Cows from a vast and perilous Alien planet to uncover many abductions from planet Earth. And to do this, you must obliterate roaming aliens, and as you exterminate these scum, different parts of the map will be unlocked. Of course, there are always some caveats. Where to start?

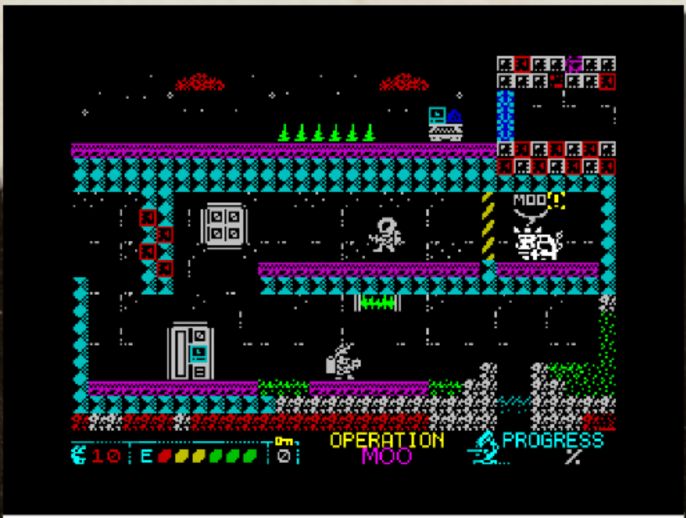
Okay, firstly, your fire power is limited in range. So, don't expect to be able to position yourself on one side of the screen and take out the Alien roamers on the other. And secondly, the jetpack that you have will only carry you a limited distance before its energy is spent. Luckily, finding a safe place will recharge it, and then you can zip around again to get you to the next safe space. This game mechanic reminds me of an excellent Commodore C64 game (whoa! Who booed me?!?) called Fairy Well, released by RGCD circa 2011.



The Operation has started! Get Mooving!

To save the bovine captives, it's as simple as hitting the exclamation mark (once you've unlocked the cage in which each Cow is being held), and there are some keys to collect too, and thankfully, the Aliens have kindly left you some ways to replenish your energy supply.

Op Moo has a "the floor is Lava" game mechanic, in which some parts of each screen will deplete your energy. You do begin with a rather generous looking 50 energy points though, which makes it an easy game to explore at least the locale.



That's one udderly trapped cow

To summarise, Op Moo is a real gem of a game. It is slickly executed and fun to play; the graphics are very nicely drawn and the music is a treat. It's definitely one for cartographers amongst us for sure, and for platform game fans, this one detracts enough from the "walk and jump" type game that crowds the genre. Now, go save some Cows!

Cows and alien abductions, they go together like jet packs and Spectrum games…but what if you could combine all four? Well, now we have the answer in the form of JuanGM's Operation Moo.

Following hot on the heels of Juan's well received Bearded Fantasy and Bonsai Quest, Operation Moo sees you exploring a hostile planet to recover some kidnapped cows and find out what those fiendish aliens are up to.

Right from the outset the game has an enormous sense of fun, whether it's the stunning cartoon artwork on the loading, menu and game over screens or the whimsical X-Files inspired AY tune that accompanies the action.

I have been critical in the past of the character movement (moo-vement?) in games made with this engine, but it appears to be more suited to the gravity bothering properties of a jet pack (and a strange alien planet). Juan has also made some impressive efforts to tweak gameplay elements by enhancing the game with some Boreal coding to beef up what can be achieved by ZXGM alone.

It's not always intuitive as to what kills you and what is simply pretty background stuff however, and it is also a little fiddly in places. This is par for the course when you grapple with 8-bit platformers so it shouldn't come as a shock for seasoned Spec-chums.

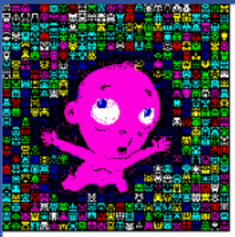
Overall it is an enjoyable romp, frustrating at times but full of character with a decent challenge and plenty to explore. Once you get into it, you may well find yourself playing it until the cows come home.

ChernobylAI

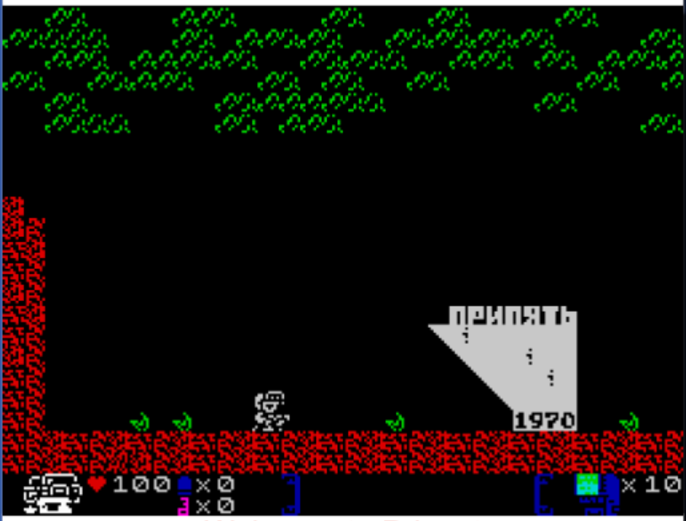
Juntelart, PixelArtM, Beyker

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44403

PWYW / €2



Bad news: the evil AI by the name of Alstrang has taken control of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Good news: you don't have to go there on that stag weekend you were dreading. But you can still visit virtually in this flip screen action game by Juntelart. Taking on the guise of Peter Sinclair (I already like the cut of his jib), you have to explore the defunct nuclear site and dismantle the Alstrang's network. This formidable intelligence is controlled by 10 Amstrad CPC 464s, which is a surprise choice when there is a different 8 bit computer that usually attracts a Specchum's ire. Nevertheless, 10 Amstrads need locating, and 10 Amstrads need a good kicking.



Welcome to Pripyat

I like a barmy backstory as much as the next man, but I'm even happier when it's obvious the author has gone to some effort and has some interest in the topic. Real scenes from around Chernobyl can be seen: the striking Pripyat 1970 monument, the swimming pool, the Duga radar, and the deserted fairground. The nuclear site itself does rely heavily on artistic license to look 'radioactive', but you can still see the posters of Lenin to demonstrate it's an era frozen in time. And while I'm on about the little touches, any game that animates tussocks of grass swaying in the breeze gets bonus points from me, or at least a raised eyebrow and an approving nod.

A seasoned gamer will probably nearly complete this on their first go. A heavily seasoned one might complete it outright, provided the white pepper doesn't get it in their eyes. Thankyou. It couldn't be called easy though, I felt at risk the whole time, and the iodine health boosts were as much needed as well placed. The same goes for the ammunition, though the game cleverly starts you without any, forcing you to practise the bullet-free option of jumping on the baddies' heads.

ChernobylAI does a better job than many recent games in the genre of making it clear what you need to do. When you need a key and don't have one the message bar tells you; when you need to kill everything on screen before you can progress it tells you; when you don't have ammo or a key—yep, it tells you. There is one exception, a puzzle almost: in order to access the reactor site, you need to recognise how to blow the entrance. Because the game doesn't give you a hint I will: you need a bullet and a good Aim.

Alongside the main author Juntelart, we have PixelArtM doing graphics and Beyker the AY music. I'm disappointed they used poorly digitised images for the loading and splash screens. It's a shame when there's a team of obviously talented artists on board. The good news is, that is pretty much my only quibble about the game. The bad news is that you'll probably defeat Alstrang and the stag do will be back on.

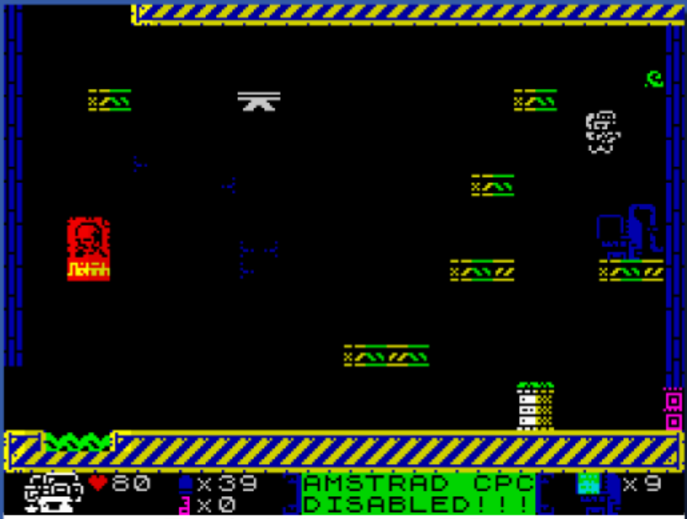
I've never seen an Amstrad up close. Or Chernobyl. But they're both things from the mid-1980s that weren't quite as successful as intended, so I suppose it makes sense that they are combined here. Adding an evil AI to the mix just completes the trilogy of technological disappointment.

Which sets up a novel environment for a fairly standard jumpy shooty platform game. The environments are nicely drawn, with some cool period architecture and imagery. I enjoy the idea that our hero parachutes into the environment but forgot to bring any bullets with him. Oops!

There are some nice quality-of-life pointers included, as Dave mentioned, which are very welcome. There's a small amount of back-tracking, as you need to explore every junction to get enough keys to progress.

I didn't get quite as far as Dave on my first go, running out of keys and then health with 5 of the 10 CPCs destroyed, but no single screen ever feels like a major challenge, right up until the very end, at last. The game rewards meticulous, patient play and is one that most of you veterans should be able to complete with a little concentration.

I need a physics joke here, but can't think of one. I'm having a bit of a meltdown, clearly.



AMSTRAD CPC DISABLED!!!

That's 300 quid on E-Bay

It Began with the Forging of a game

into which a brave young lad named Mario poured all his craft, his time and his will to entertain

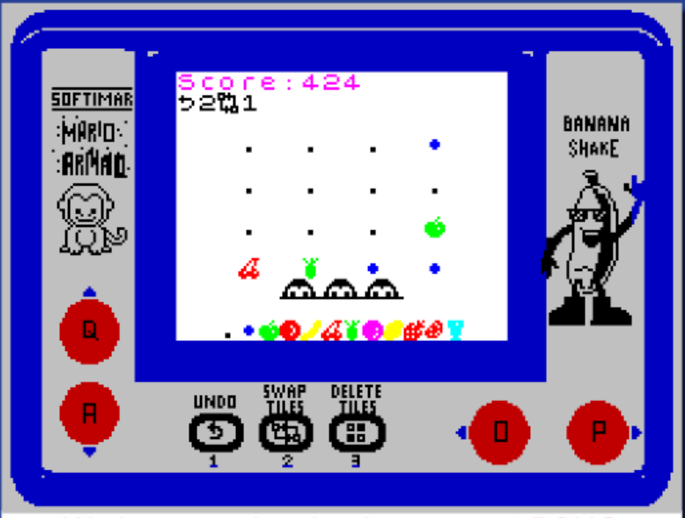
Banana Shake

Softimar / Mário Armão Ferreira

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44390

Free

and Mpk, chief of his order, wrote a review....



We love our dancing bananas at BSHQ

You've played Threes, right? If you owned a phone about 10 years ago, there's a good chance you did. It's one of those designs where, on playing it for the first time, you feel like you must have played it before, as it must have always existed. Like, say, Tetris. And if you haven't, then you may well have played one of its derivatives such as 1024 or, imaginatively, 2048.

Or, now, Banana Shake.

In case you haven't played any of those, here's how Banana Shake works. You have fruit on a grid. You slide all the fruit at once in a cardinal direction. If a fruit slides into another similar fruit, they combine to form the next more valuable fruit. A single new low-value fruit is added to an empty space after each move, and the game is to score as many points as you can by carefully combining things without the grid filling up. If it's full and you can't match anything, then it's game over.

It sounds simple, and it is.

But it may not sound compelling. But it *absolutely* is.

So, so compelling. Addictive. Mesmerizing even, with time disappearing without fuss after every slide, until it's 1am and you forgot to walk the dog. The planning you need to avoid bottlenecks is precise, but simple enough that you can get into a quick rhythm. Quite the sweet spot.

There are some assists available here too - as you play, you build up tokens that allow you to undo a move, delete a single tile or swap two tiles' positions. Presentation is crisp and colourful, with a lovely Game And Watch styled interface that presents everything you need clearly, including the strip of fruit in ascending order.

So, you may be thinking, that's clearly an Ace. He loves it!

Except.

This is in BASIC, and runs like it's up to its hips in day-old fruit smoothie. Every key-press takes an eternity, to the extent that initially I thought it had crashed. It's completely untenable.

If you're running on an emulator, of course, you can bump the CPU up to about 400%. Then it runs snappily, but you have the issue where the fire button is hypersensitive when you're trying to swap tiles around.

So in the end, this is a solid implementation of a classic game that you can't actually enjoy on an actual Spectrum. But if you can run it at enhanced speed, this is most excellent.

But something happened then

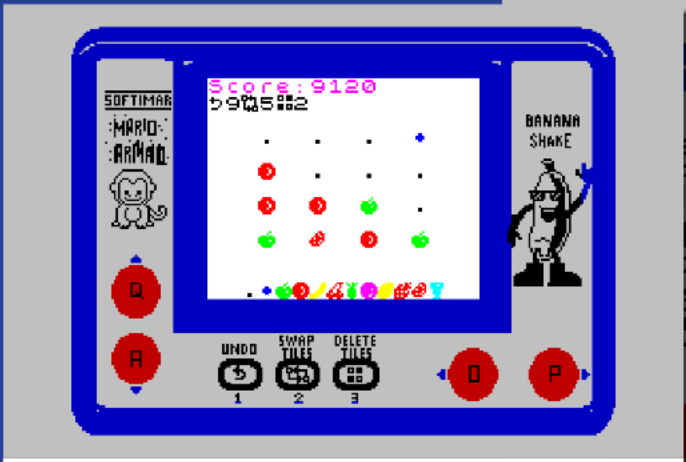
which Mario did not intend. The game was picked up by the unlikeliest of creatures; an elder on the forum of Spectrum Computing, who took note of Mario's efforts and showed him some cantrips that would make his game run more rapidly. At first, he was wisely cautious, but in time he realised the truth in the ancient ways. And so, a new version was released...

Since Mpk's review, a compiled version has appeared that solves all the speed issues. That's doubly good news, because the game is tremendous fun, and I could never have bettered his fruit smoothie analogy.

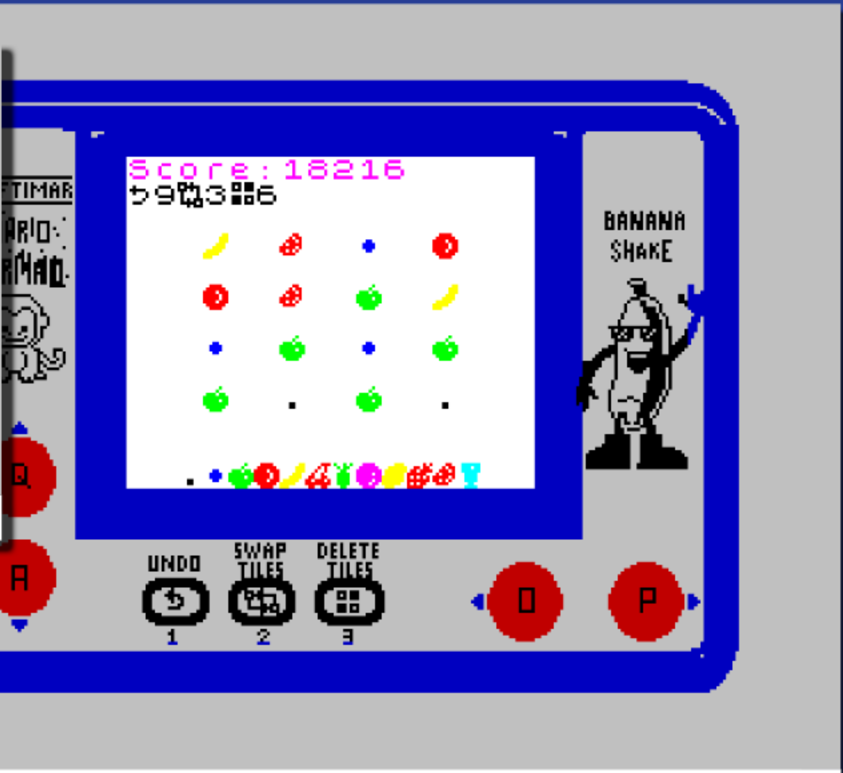
Banana Shake is a neat variant of 2048. In that, 2 + 2 = 4, 4 + 4 = 8 and so on, but here we're dealing with powers of fruit. So you'll need to become accustomed to the idea that blueberry + blueberry = apple, apple + apple = orange, and then banana, cherry, pineapple, coconut, lemon, strawberry, watermelon lead to the grail itself—the banana milkshake. Personally, I think an apple ranks higher than a lemon, and coconuts are overrated, but there's no accounting for taste, is there?

The Ed. nailed it with 'compelling', 'addictive', and 'mesmerising'. I don't have a dog to forget to walk, but it certainly gobbled up my Sunday morning (playing the game that is, not my non-existent dog). It's easy to score into the 3000's and have a strawberry on the board, but after that things start to get cramped and you'll be tested.

Banana Shake might not make your jaw drop, but it creeps up on you and ends up being your game of the week. Playing it is absorbing, and combined with the warm glow provided by the beeper rendition of Grandstand, it must be better for you than your five-a-day.



A melon slice! That's half way!



2 Melon Slices! Just one move from Gaming Nirvana!

For goodness sake, I've got the hippy hippy shakes. The Game & Watch aesthetic definitely suits the simplistic 2048 gameplay - sliding fruit into fruits to make better fruits. The addition of the Undo, Swap and Delete tiles bonuses awarded throughout your progress make the game less likely to end in you throwing it through the window than it's browser/app based forefather... but if you're good at 2048 (which I am) you'll get more fun from not using them.

Unfortunately the bleeps accompanying the movement quickly become slightly annoying. Having fought my way all the way through to the final fruit de résistance, the titular shake, I was a bit disappointed to just be rewarded with the same opening theme. Though it did take me to being a child back at my Gran's house ignoring Grandstand again, wishing I had Nintendo's Cement Factory.

If I were fussy I'd have liked the tiles to graphically 'slide', and the option to turn off the beeps – but it's just as compelling a game as ever, and if you're not sick of 2048 already and don't have a banana allergy, it'll provide a good hit of puzzle-y fun.

And so it came to pass
that Banana Shake ensnared many new players.
And as for Mario, he finally rode to his rest, to hearth and home.
He took a deep breath. 'Well, I'm back', he said. 'With my ACE!'

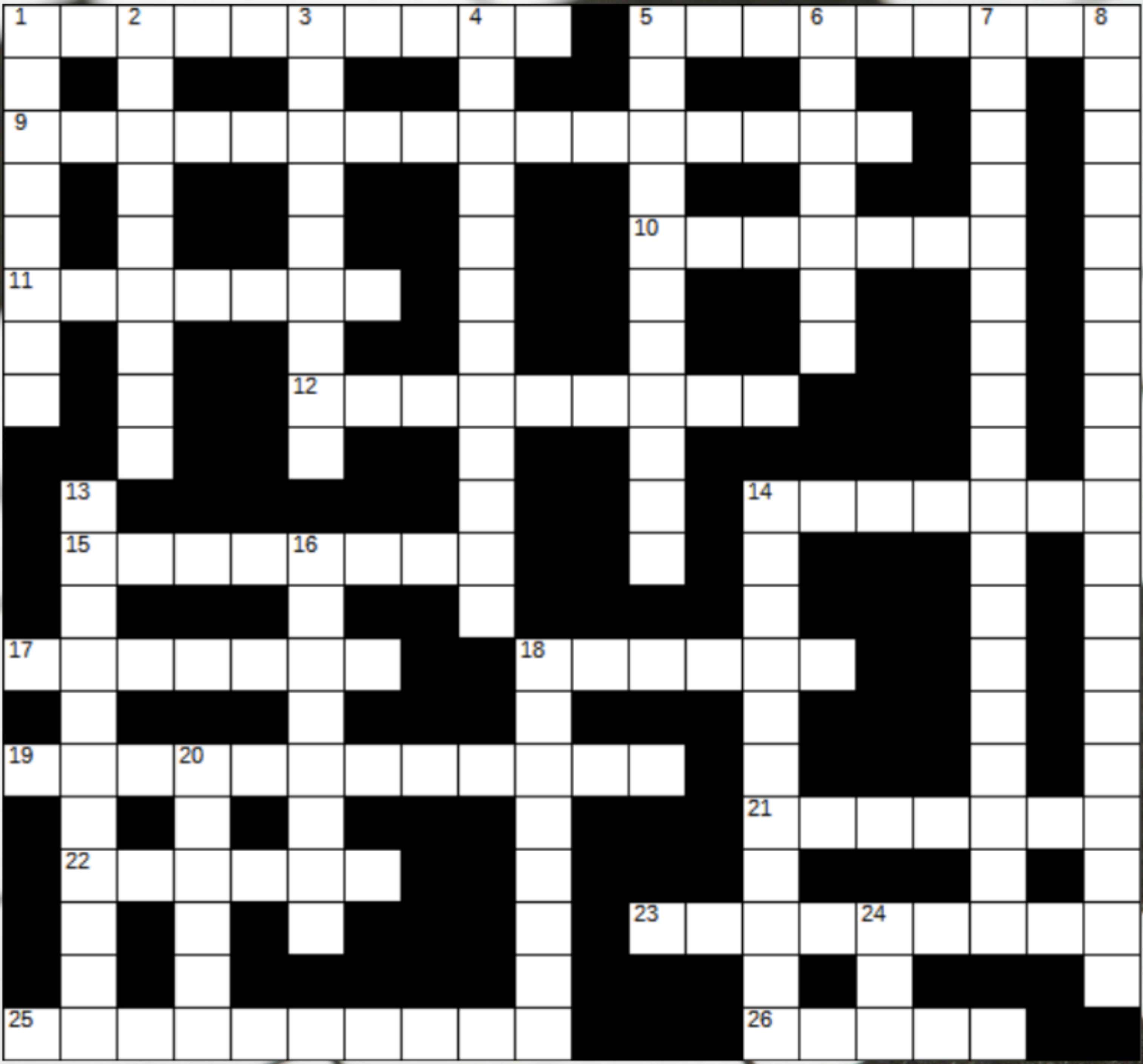
Issue Two Hard-To-Do Word Zoo

(aka The Crossword)

Greencard's back with another devious crossword puzzle.
Why not while away a sunny evening on your balcony with a glass of Riesling by your side and a pen in the corner of your mouth? You'll look ever so intellectual.

Across:
1. Award-winning puzzle game from last year (10)
5. An apparently very heavily re-used title for a game (4, 5)
9. Russian Flappy Bird clone (8, 8)
10. Touchdown area (3, 4)
11. Software commonly used to create music on older systems (7)
12. Could either be Dark or Omega (9)
14. Maze/puzzler from Iber Software (7)
15. Sounds like an energy drink for vigilantes (8)
17. Decathlon's ninth event (7)
18. Could be a Crown, a Curse or a Descent (6)
19. Colourful AGD game from 2020 (7, 3, 2)
21. What you would do to an engine if you shut it off too soon after being started from cold (5, 2)
22. Connecticut Leather Company. Nothing to do with the Spectrum. Sorry about that. (6)
23. The Incredible Shrinking ________ (9)
25. Futuristic racer from Mirror Soft (4, 6)
26. What a schmuk this guy is! (5)

Down:
1. Arch foot? (5, 3)
2. Best of the best (3, 2, 4)
3. Text adventure and 80s UK soul/R&B band (5, 4)
4. Organ thief (5, 7)
5. Developer of Shadow Of The Beast (11)
6. Top-down action game native to a particular habitat (7)
7. Spanish murder mystery from 2022 (8, 10)
8. Spectrum port of famous Howard Scott Warshaw Atari game (7, 2, 3, 4, 3)
13. Fantastic departure (5, 6)
14. The ____ ____ ____, isometric game created with 3D Game Maker (5, 2, 4)
16. Puzzlingly heavy traffic (8)
18. Witchking of Midnight (8)
20. No flaw? (6)
24. Dweezil or Denzil, say (3)

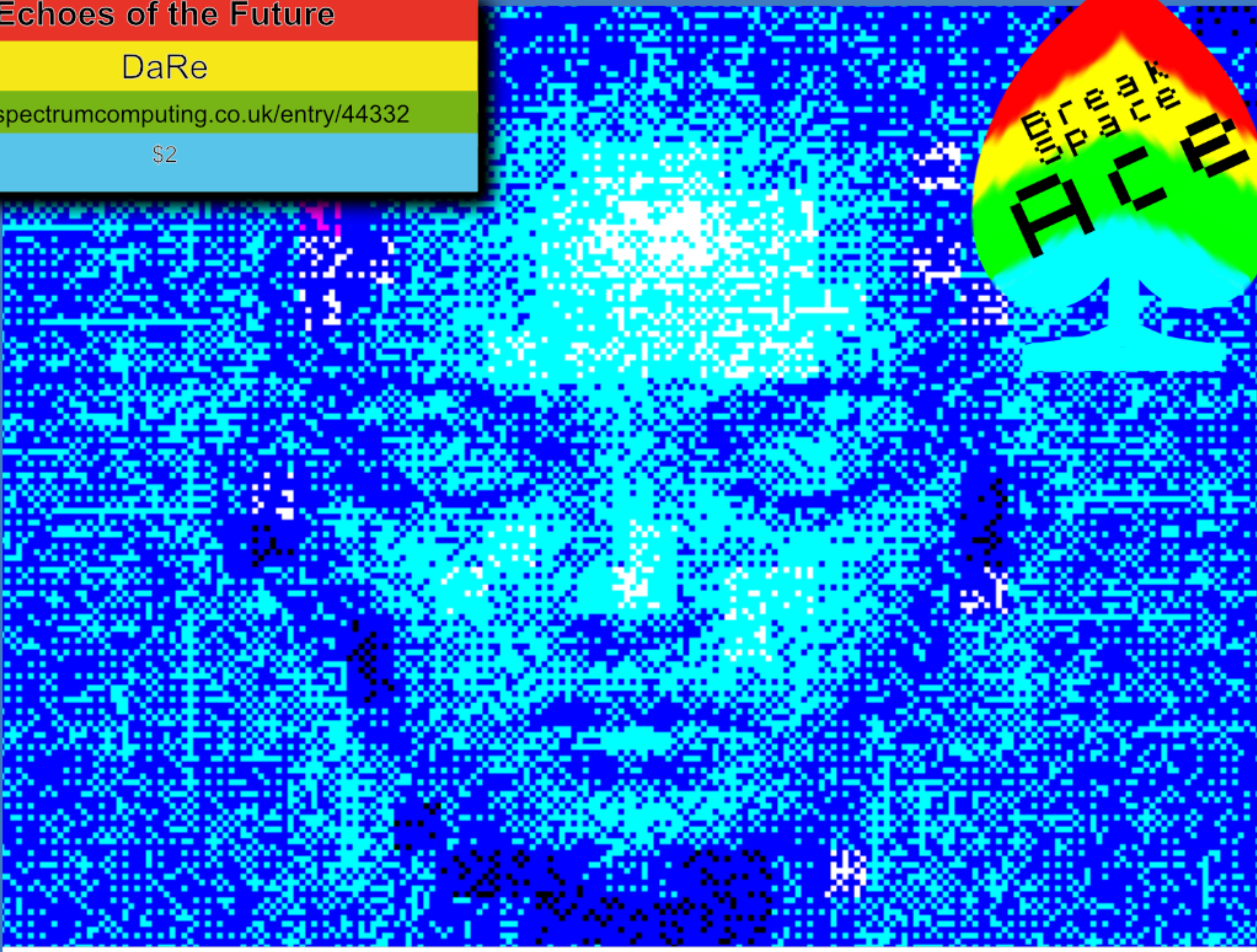


Echoes of the Future

DaRe

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44332

$2



Cause Nothing Compares, Nothing Compares to (CP)U

An ambitious 3-chapter text adventure, Echoes of the Future takes you on a narrative trip through time, from the dawn of Man to the ends of the Earth. Opening on a pre-historic tribe, the focus shifts to an age-of-sail calamity at sea and finally to the final days of a far-future apocalypse.

Kubrick's 2001 is one obvious inspiration, in the initial section at least, but themes of time travel and A.I. soon set the story on its own path. Dense, atmospheric text make each the games 3 sections compelling and immersive. Many objects mentioned can be examined for additional detail, even if they are just scenery. It delivers a real sense of mystery, culminating in a satisfying twist. Text adventures walk a fine line, as we mentioned last issue when covering DaRe's Erinia. The story tends to be at odds with the puzzling, fundamentally, and it's a rare talent to balance the two. This is very much a story-first adventure.

But even so the puzzles are naturalistic and logical throughout and, for the first 2 sections at least, mesh perfectly with the narrative. You don't feel like there's any padding - every move is in line with the action, and the dialogue and descriptive text keep up a sense of urgency and progress. It's not too difficult either, barring an inscrutable maze section in part 3. Part 2 and the second half of 3 are time-limited, with a countdown ticking away after every turn, although I only really felt the pressure in 2. It all adds to the tension, and realistically means that you will take some play throughs to figure out the puzzles and sight-see before putting together an efficient run to beat the clock.

Perhaps the most challenging feat will be getting this to run - written in the Inform language, DaRe has opted to require a +3 and the CP/M operating system, for which you'll have to track down a disk image. Once it's loaded though, it benefits from the fantastic Inform engine functionality, which means a clever, user-friendly parser and a minimum of frustration.

The game comes complete with a novelistic walk-thru in case you do get stuck along the way, ensuring that everyone should get to the end of the story, and you'll want to. There are a couple of moments in the 3rd act where adventure-gamey tendancies take over with some slightly obtuse puzzles (and that baffling, inertia-sapping maze section), but on balance it's a fair and enthralling experience.

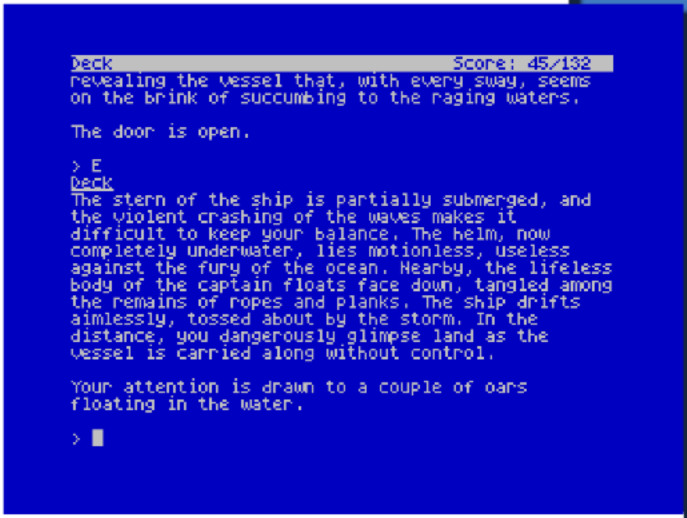
It's worth noting too that DaRe has used 'AI' translation from his native Spanish to English, which may give some purists pause, but in a game featuring the duality of AI, that friction seems oddly appropriate.

This is a top quality package, in both a technical and narrative sense.

There's something magical about text adventures that drag you kicking and screaming into another world – especially when that world bridges the dawn of mankind and a forgotten future.

Getting Echoes of the Future running took some effort, but not as much as you'd think. Sure, there were hurdles: first, the +3 requirement, then the whole CP/M situation (which, despite owning an Amstrad CPC back in the day, I'd never actually used). But within minutes, I'd grabbed CP/M from the Internet Archive, auto-loaded it in Fuse, swapped disks, and typed "PLAY GAME". Just like that, I was in.

The transition couldn't have been more jarring. One moment I'm wrestling with archaic file systems; the next, I'm flung head first into a primal struggle for survival. The game wastes no time: I wake up as a cave-dwelling tribesman in a world where every day is a fight against hunger, injury, and the indifferent wilderness. My first task? Save a dying clansman by venturing into the unknown to find healing herbs – all while 2001: A Space Odyssey-style weirdness hums in the background.



```
Deck                                   Score: 45/132
revealing the vessel that, with every sway, seems
on the brink of succumbing to the raging waters.

The door is open.

> E
Deck
The stern of the ship is partially submerged, and
the violent crashing of the waves makes it
difficult to keep your balance. The helm, now
completely underwater, lies motionless, useless
against the fury of the ocean. Nearby, the lifeless
body of the captain floats face down, tangled among
the remains of ropes and planks. The ship drifts
aimlessly, tossed about by the storm. In the
distance, you dangerously glimpse land as the
vessel is carried along without control.

Your attention is drawn to a couple of oars
floating in the water.

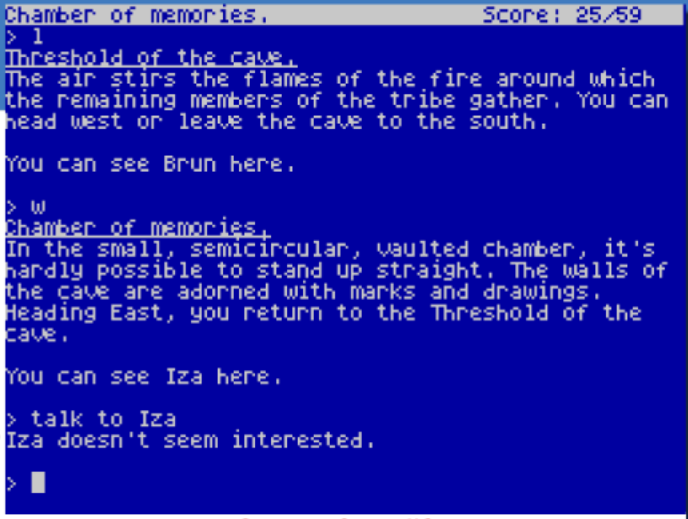
> █
```

Captain on the Bridge! Face down, but still.

Echoes of the Future draws clear inspiration from 2001: A Space Odyssey – not as a direct adaptation, but as a thoughtful exploration of similar themes and narrative techniques. Like Kubrick's masterpiece, the game unfolds across disparate epochs in time, with players assuming different roles in different eras, journeying toward an ambiguous destiny.

This is clearly a labour of love. The included PDF guide reads more like a companion novel than a walk-through, ensuring players never feel stuck – a rare mercy in text adventures. Multiplatform support adds to its appeal, though the Game Boy Advance version (bless its ambition) suffers without a physical keyboard.

In the end, what surprised me was how completely the story pulled me in. This isn't just a text adventure – it's a mysterious undulating glowing orb, cracking open to reveal humanity's earliest nightmares and most alien hopes. As I played, I realised something: adulthood had sanded down my sense of wonder, replacing it with spreadsheets and software updates. Echoes cuts through all that. It's a bone knife pressed into your hand, a monolith glowing on the horizon, and the terrifying, exhilarating question: What will you do next?



```
Chamber of memories.                    Score: 25/59
> l
Threshold of the cave.
The air stirs the flames of the fire around which
the remaining members of the tribe gather. You can
head west or leave the cave to the south.

You can see Brun here.

> w
Chamber of memories.
In the small, semicircular, vaulted chamber, it's
hardly possible to stand up straight. The walls of
the cave are adorned with marks and drawings.
Heading East, you return to the Threshold of the
cave.

You can see Iza here.

> talk to Iza
Iza doesn't seem interested.

> █
```

Story of my life.

DaRe's recent adventures are generally not too hard, and if you get stuck there's an accompanying story book that'll give you a bloody big clue. Their strength is in the concept and writing, with 'Echoes' being perhaps his most literary adventure so far (it says 'tempest' instead of 'storm' for example). So while playing this unfolding story, I was shaking my head at its brilliance: "It's like Cloud Atlas", I told myself. And it is in the sense that we have a series of short scenes set in wildly different locations and times, each one linked by a journey across some kind of barrier. Then I read JB's review which references 2001: A Space Odyssey, and much to my annoyance that's a more accurate comparison.

On the practical side, this is mostly well structured with a lot of consideration for the player. While a lot of the text is 'writing', it still tells you everything you need to know, including steering you away from wild goose chases. The only place it lets itself down are where it changes tack and has you wandering a maze of radioactive streets. Overall though, Echoes of the Future gives you the rare treat of feeling like you're playing a book.

DiaTanX

KTB Productions

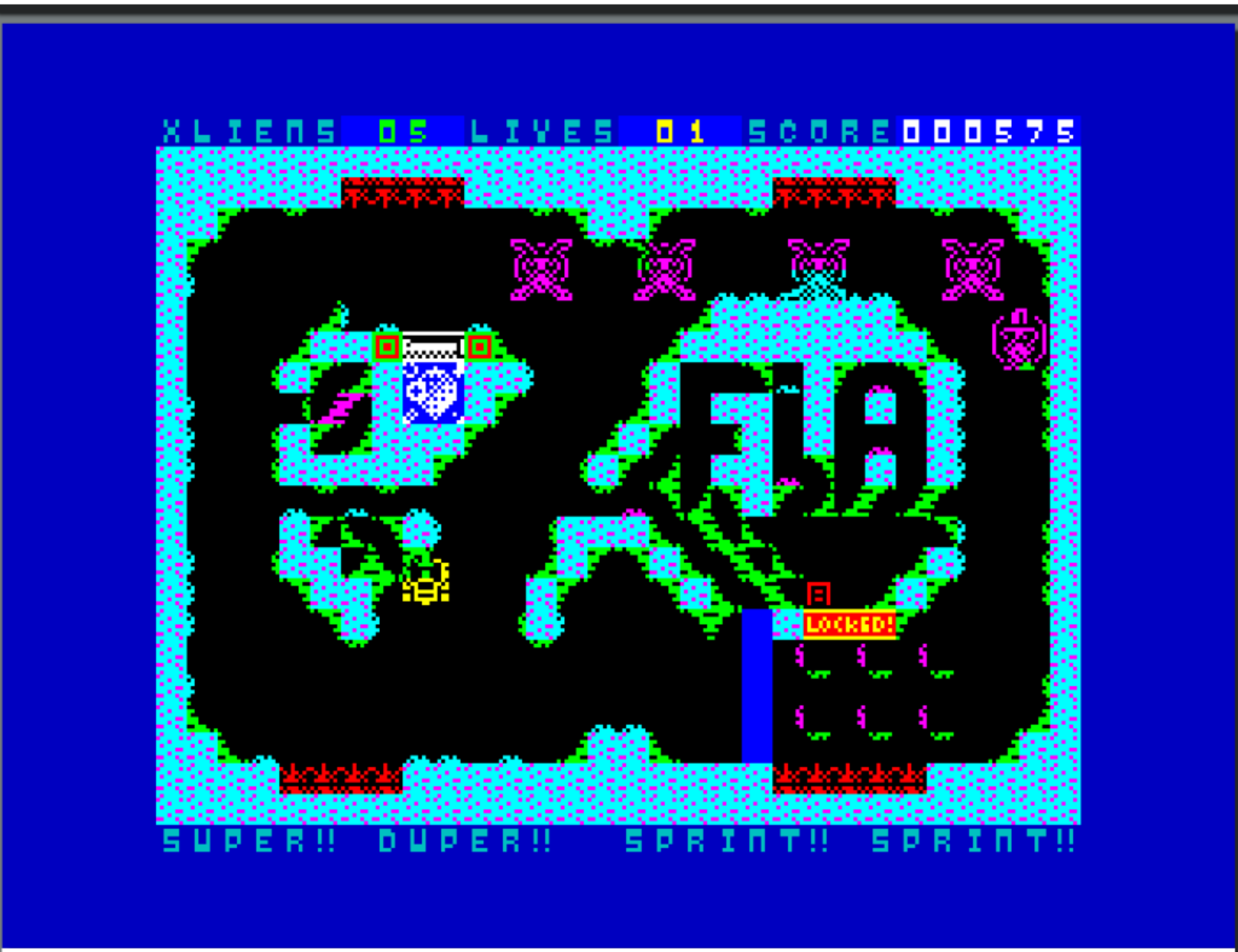
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44412

PWYW / $2

I had a lot of fun in my time with DiaTanX – with it strongly reminding me of Wizard Of Wor (the 1980 arcade game that finally got a worthy ZX Spectrum version in 2007), with a hint of ChuChuRocket (Dreamcast) thrown in for good measure. The core conceit of guiding the baddies to their demise rather than out and out shooting them, effectively turns each of the single screens into in a puzzle to be solved - and there is a sense of panic when the xliens or the wandering diamond are close by. Shooting a* xlien turns it into bum-on-legs (or back again) and this is a sprite that has given me nightmares. Not just because it's a bum-on-legs, but because it behaves erratically by turning in a random direction when it can continue no further in a straight line – unlike the normal baddies that are gloriously predictable in how they'll turn when cornered.

The varied graphical backgrounds, layouts, and level names keep this relatively small number of moving parts interesting across the stages, and it really does hark back to a time of early single screen arcade games. The heritage of Pac-Man, Lady Bug, Amidar et al. can strongly be seen here.

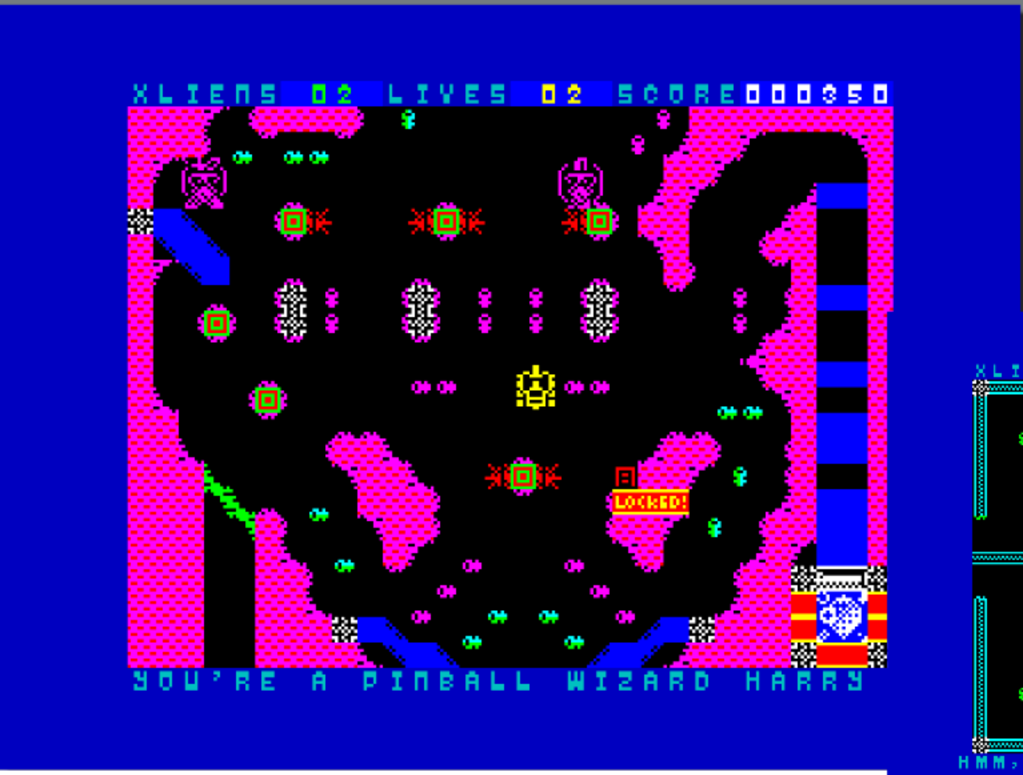
Splitting hairs, there are occasionally a few graphical glitches when xliens are vanquished – but nothing to spoil the gameplay – and the 128K music throughout is fine rather than exceptional. But altogether DiaTanX a nice throwback to what early arcade games used to be. Recommended.


XLIENS 05 LIVES 01 SCORE 000575
LOCKED!
SUPER!! DUPER!! SPRINT!! SPRINT!!

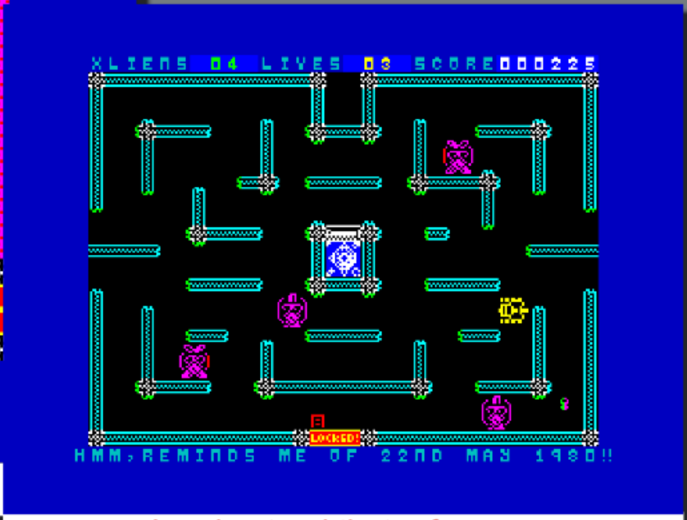
It's a Sprint Finish

---

*Or 'an', depending on how you pronounce 'xlien'. I'm going with 'cross-lien'.



Unlike any amusement hall, frankly


XLIENS 04 LIVES 03 SCORE000225
LOCKED!
HMM,REMINDS ME OF 22ND MAY 1980!!

I understood that reference

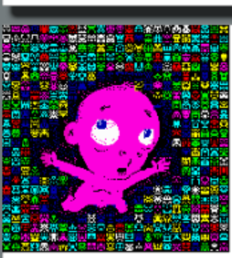
What's in a name? Take io.rrwm's latest game DiaTanX, what could that possibly mean? Is it about someone called Di getting a suntan in the shape of a large X? Is it about someone who struggles to spell, trying to exist on a diet of eggs? Is it DiaTan's social media profile? Well it turns out it's none of these things but instead it's a rather snazzy little tank game from the mind that brought us Painter Man and Throbbing Headache. (Ah, "Tanx"! I get it now!)

DiaTanX sees you taking control of a little yellow tank and your mission is simple: kill the aliens (or "Xliens") and move onto the next screen, kill more and repeat. Although the concept is simple, you can burn through a few lives before you get the knack of it. You can't go in all guns blazing, if you do, you aren't going to get very far. To see the later stages of this game you will have to adopt a more strategic, almost puzzle style approach to each level.

Once you get your eye in, you realise you have to look for patterns, anticipate where the Xliens are headed and make sure they steer themselves into trouble and not into your little tank, while making sure said little tank stays out of trouble!

This game has sensible level progression, some clever room names and designs that will delight fans of fun retro pop culture references.

This is another tip-top game from io.rrwm who has a real knack for making exactly the kind of single screen arcade fun that I love playing. This one has been released without much fanfare, has an odd name and takes a couple of goes to get into. However for those who take the plunge and stick at it, there is a rich reward of a quality gaming experience, so make sure you don't sleep on this one as the kids would say!



I don't know where KTB Productions get their ideas, but I'll wager it involves eating Gouda before bed and scribbling down whichever night terror happens to wake them at 3.12am. That, and a lot of time sandboxing interesting game mechanics. In this case the night terror is invading Xliens (pronounced Eksliens or Zzlions?), and the interesting mechanic is trying to shepherd the things to their deaths. This happens by unleashing roaming hazards (called Diamond Death) or diverting them into spikes by shooting them.

The author really cuts loose with their already distinctive graphical style—it's trippy as hell but not distracting. Having said that I did lose a few lives wondering if the Xliens turn into walking buttocks when you shoot them, and I'm convinced they do.

DiaTanx is fun to play, and while I applaud anything that dares to be experimental, it does feel like unfinished business. The 8-way tank movement is great, but we're hemmed in most of the time and don't get the benefit. So I'm going to be greedy and enjoy this as the main, ask for a more open tank game for pudding.

What did you just call me?

Watch your back, Dave. Watch your back.

Hair Trigger

MicroChops

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/43035

Free

Anyone who has been around the Speccy scene in the last few years is likely to have encountered one of Mr Hair's amazing adventures. Our heroic strand is becoming something of a modern Speccy icon, having now starred in five mainline adventures, as well as a few remixes, special editions and cameo appearances.

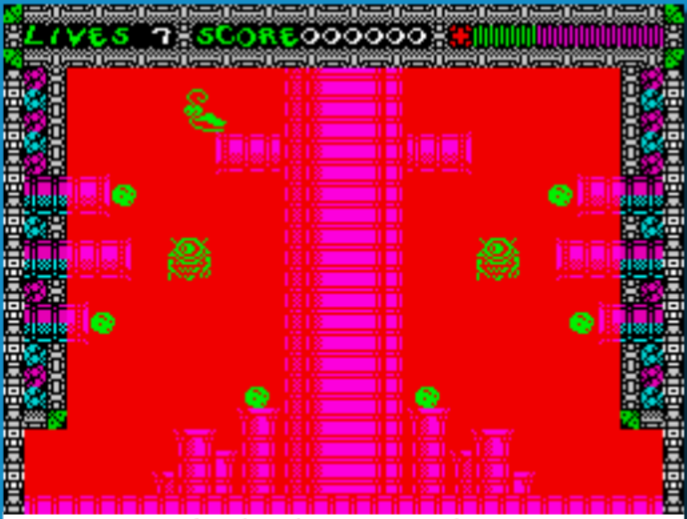
In his latest escapade, Mr Hair dons his cape and takes on his SuperHair alter ego to save the planet from some deadly toxic gases by navigating a series of screens to find and release 11 levers.

So begins MicroChop's colourful flick screen adventure "Hair Trigger". First off, it's difficult to talk about this game without mentioning the word Cybernoid. While the graphical style and busy levels are clearly an inspiration, Hair Trigger contains a few more puzzle elements and while tough, it isn't quite so brutally unforgiving as Raffaele Cecco's masterpiece.

It is certainly a challenge though, some of the rooms are really tough to progress through and you'll need some good old fashioned 8-bit skills. It's not just the gaming elite that get to experience what this game has to offer however. Lee "Chops" Stevenson has thoughtfully released a cheat mode with infinite lives alongside the main game ensuring those with every gaming ability get to join in the fun. In addition he has provided a helpful map, which is invaluable when tracking down the 11 levers.

A lot of thought has clearly gone into this, there's plenty of well designed platform puzzling that requires a bit of thinking and no little gaming chops to navigate. There are buttons to plunge that unlock pathways & baddies to shoot that plunge the buttons that unlock those pathways.

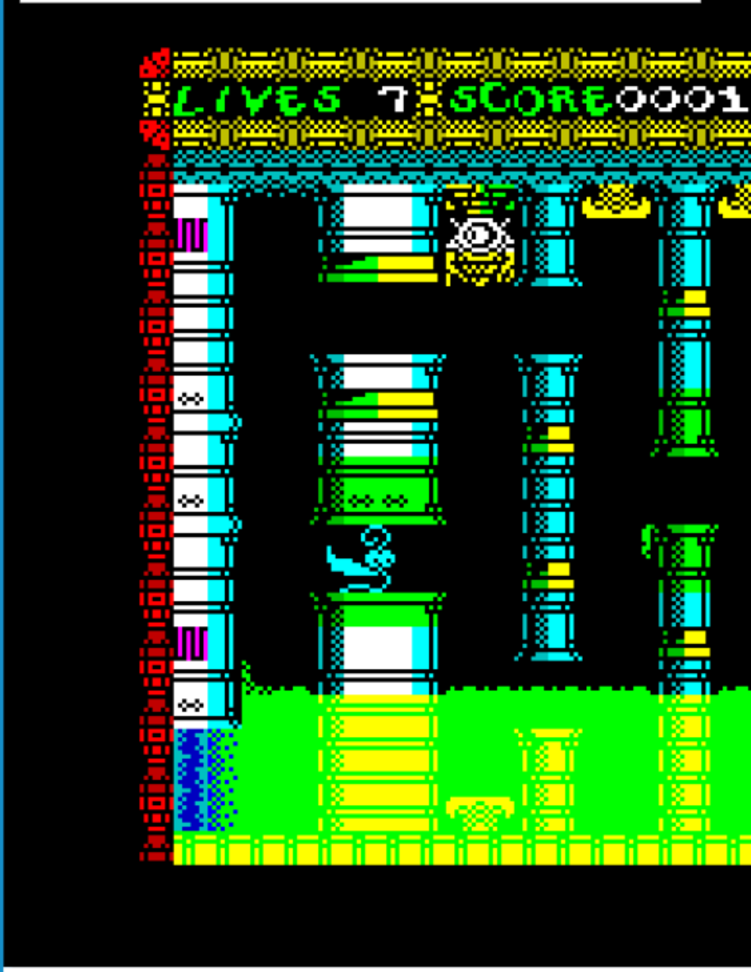
All of which is illustrated by beautifully colourful cartoony sprites and backgrounds and the inventive screens simply burst with character. Just make sure you have some sunglasses to hand for the toxic level, yellow on green is certainly a choice!



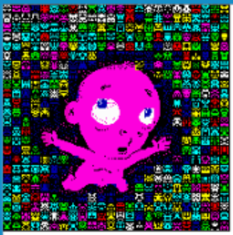
A migraine, yesterday.

The game also comes with a ULA+ enhanced mode, generally I prefer to play the game in the range of colours Sir Clive initially blessed us with, however it's nice to have the option and the toxic levels in the ULA+ version are a lot easier on the eye.

Overall Hair Trigger is an extremely polished game, with a generous range of extras and enhancements but over and above all of this the game remembers the most important thing and that is to be FUN, a lot of fun. So if you are combing this mag for a top game to play, you don't need to mullet over for long. you'd be off your head to give this one the brush off.



You're toxic, I'm slip



The best thing about Hair Trigger is that it looks more Cybernoid than Cybernoid. That twisted alien plumbing and those spore shooting prolapses never looked so good, especially with the ULA+ version. The gameplay has more in common with ‘spawnalot’ games like Starquake & Atic Atac, which is a problem for me because they rarely give you chance to settle and enjoy the scenery. Add to that the strobe light border flashing, the hypnotic & ever-plummeting AY music, and I feel like a confused pensioner that’s wandered into an amusement arcade by mistake.

However, after tinkering with the emulator settings, I can enjoy it. This is because you can remove the border effects, enjoy the extended colours, and in 48K mode only get the beeper sounds. That’s when you see how good the game is. Having different grades of baddy is a great idea, and one that I’m surprised isn’t seen more often. So as well as shooting the nasties, you can make them work for you.

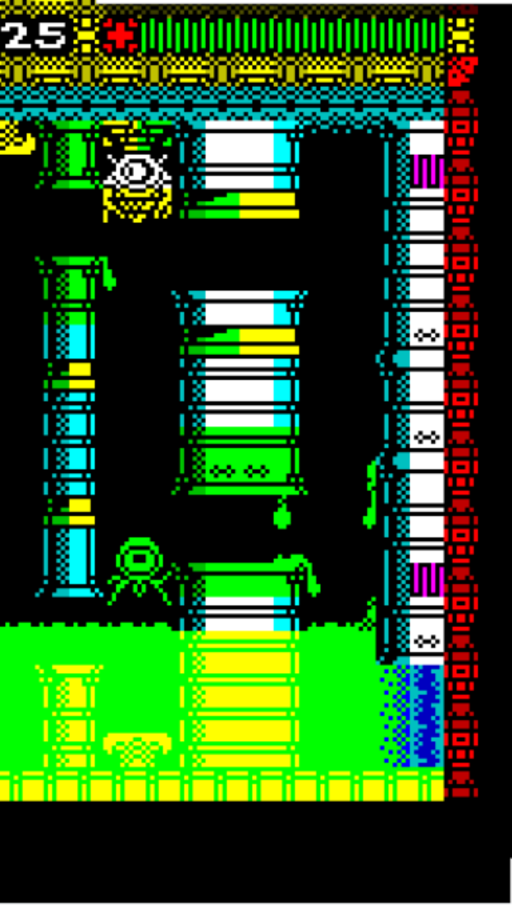
Hair Trigger warmly invites you to play with superb graphics, an interesting world to explore, a fair difficulty level, and a cheat mode to ease you in. If only it wasn’t such an assault on the senses.

Hair triumph! That, folks, is my two-word review

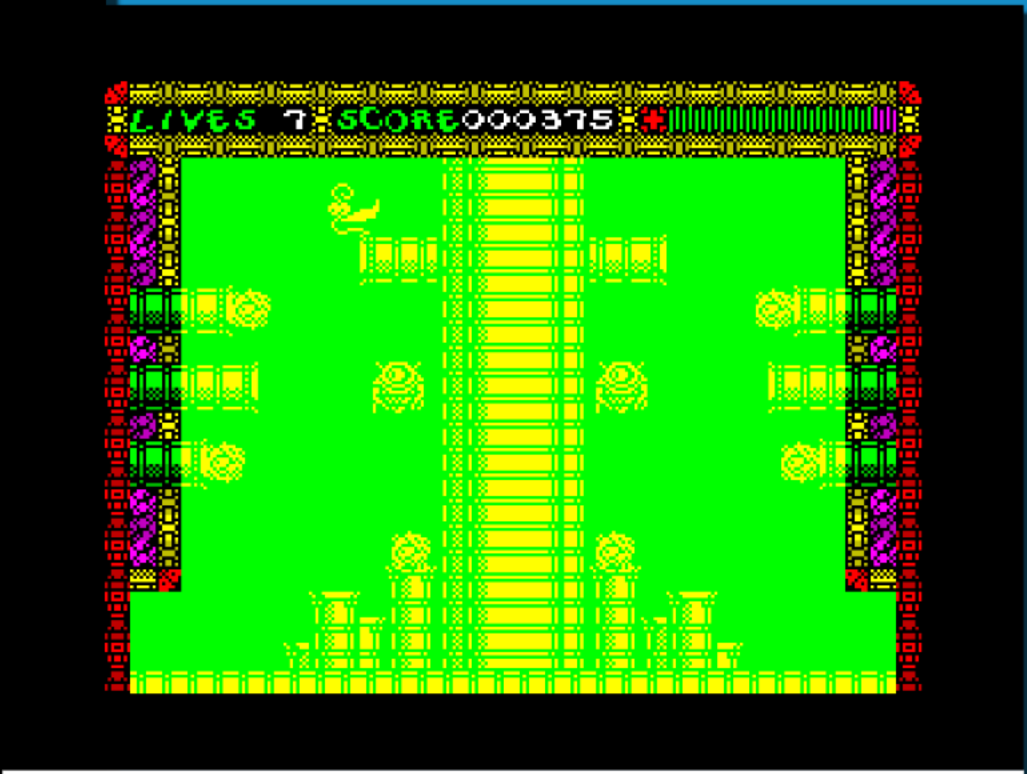
The loading screen is awesome. The use of digitized speech adds an element of excitement. The game is graphically superb, and the music is of the highest standard. It's a feast for the senses. It also has ULA+ enhancements, which I haven’t been able to try yet. (I'm writing this review from a small foldable table somewhere in the Dordogne, underneath the shade of a small sail – all that’s protecting me from the 30°C heat of the midday sun. I’m using the rather excellent JSSpeccy browser-based emulator and a tiny foldable keyboard. ULA+ is something that will have to wait until I’m back home and have access to my N-Go.)

Think Ray Winstone à la Sexy Beast, and you’re on the right track. But enough about my holiday before my keyboard melts! I have more to say about Hair Trigger. The game reminds me of Cybernoid a bit, and Ultimate’s Cookie a bit too, although the former will give you a more accurate idea of what to expect. It’s a big maze-like playing area where you press switches and levers to gain access to new areas of the map. All the while, a variety of baddies spawn in. Some you can shoot and some you can’t. The enemy sprites look fantastic. My favourite is the acid splash – clearly someone put a lot of work into how that animates, and it was well worth it.

In conclusion, C’est bon! Hopefully you’re a hairs breadth from downloading it!



ping under



Aaaagh! My eyes!

Glossary

'What are these awful nerds talking about?', you may ask yourself. Fair question.

If you're not yet quite fully immersed in the Spectruverse, there may well some terminology that needs explaining.

Let's try.

ZXDB

The founder of the feast, in many ways. If you want to find info on a Spectrum game (or company, or developer, or magazine or whatever) then you're going to use a site such as Spectrumcomputing.co.uk. This, along with several other sites, sits atop the ZX Database, a respository of ancient wisdom.
The DB contains details of practically every Spectrum title and product ever released, and many that weren't ever released. It is constantly updated, with releases usually once per month. They even have details of BreakSpace in there.
You can download the whole thing from the github site and run it locally for all your querying pleasure, if you like.

Of optimum importance is the unique ZXDB ID which is assigned to every entity - you'll see those on the review header links in Break Space, as they are used on SpectrumComputing.co.uk and other sites. Frogger RX, for instance, is 44207.

https://github.com/zxdb/ZXDB

ZXSR

ZX Spectrum Reviews is another database, which stores, well, the text of reviews of games from magazines of yesteryear. Want to see if Big K reviewed Potty Pigeon? Just plug in the game's ZXDB id (9366) and off you go!

Results are in xml, but hey. Breakspace reviews aren't there yet, but maybe soon.

http://www.zxspectrumreviews.co.uk

Inform / Z-Machine

A little history lesson : In the olden days, a company named Infocom produced some legendary text adventures on PC/Mac etcetera : Zork, Planetfall, Lurking Horror, Leather Goddesses of Phobos and so on. To facilitate cross-platform development, they designed a virtual computer named the Z-Machine, and their games technically ran on that, with other platforms emulating it. The engine provides a best-in-class text parser, and benefits from 45 years of development.
Inform is a compiler, developed in the 1990s, which allows developers to write games and produce Z-Machine compatible files. This has become something of a standard, and allows text-adventure authors to easily develop cross-platform games in a powerful engine.

On the Spectrum, z-Machine games are really only viable on the +3, as the extra RAM and accessible storage on disk are required.
ZXZVM is an interpreter that lets you play z-Machine games on the +3
Some games, like Echoes of the Future, expect you run the CP/M operating system, then use *that* to run a Z-Machine interpreter. Wheels within wheels.
We think you'll agree though that the engine provides a better experience than most native text adventures.
(And while we're here, CP/M is a 1970s disk operating system (DOS) from Digital, which foreshadowed many modern computing systems. Phew.)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inform
https://www.seasip.info/ZX/zxzvm.html

CSSCGC

Or, to use its full name : The comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition

Spawned on the Usenet group decades ago, this is an annual contest to see who can write the crappest game for the Spectrum or other Sinclair computer (QL, ZX80 etc).

It runs all year, with a single judge choosing the best and worst games based on their own nebulous criteria. Sometimes there's a prize for the worst game, but entrants must be careful : if they accidentally make a good game,there may be a terrible downside. The punishment for writing the *best* game is to be the judge the following year.
Several of the BreakSpace staff have been judges in the past, Jamie as recently as 2023.

BreakSpace does not review games submitted to the CSSCGC. We're crazy, but not that crazy.

https://csscgc2025.blogspot.com

USENET

Once upon a time, the internet was great. And Usenet was the best bit, before the web came along and ruined everything.

The 'User's Network' is a series of topic-specific discussion groups. Thousands of 'em! Mostly dormant now, of course. The once thriving comp.sys.sinclair, for instance, has 3 threads this year. One announcing the CSSCGC, one announcing Break Space, and one guy saying hello in italian. Ciao Simon!

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usenet

The Spectrum

A licensed, Spectrum-emulating look-a-like machine released to retail in 2024. Featuring a bunch of built in games and USB support to load more, this is a simple way to get a Spectrum connected to your HDMI TV without worrying about Ebay scams and weird cables and soldering irons. It supports 128k machine emulation of course, but looks like a classic 48k and will draw admiring gasps from your dinner-party guests. It doesn't support wireless controllers for Some Stupid Reason, so that's a bummer, but certain wireless keyboards work fine. So if you're an experienced QAOPer, you're sorted.

https://retrogames.biz/products/thespectrum/

ZX Spectrum NEXT / N-Go

Launched in 2017, the ZX Spectrum NEXT is an 8-bit computer which is compatible with the 80s Spectrums. It has either 1024 or 2048Kb of memory, depending on which version you bought, and can run its CPU at up to 28MHz (compared with the original Spectrum's 3.5 Mhz).
It's a decent way to run original Spectrum games and hardware, while also supporting a modernised 8-bit platform that's become its own thing.
The design was also done by the designer of the original Speccy, and it's a fine looking machine.

The N-Go is a fully ZX Spectrum NEXT compatible machine from a different manufacturer, which may be easier to get a hold of. It doesn't look as cool though. Although, you can also buy an N-Go in a kit form and make it look like whatever you want.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ZX_Spectrum_Next

https://www.specnext.com

https://manuferhi.com/c/n-go

The End

again

0 OK, 10:1

You've made it to the end! Whee!

Hopefully you'll found some games you want to check out, had fun typing in some BASIC or just had a sensible chuckle.

It's a balmly summer's eve here at BreakSpace HQ, and we're all retiring to enjoy some well-deserved barbeque and an Aperol Spritz, and maybe a little argument about Aces, as is our custom.

Cheers!

Got any comments, suggestions, complaints? Mail BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com and we'll consider your points - and may publish your wise words in a future issue.

Mpk

Next Time :

Even more reviews, including :
Star Carrier Ruffian
Another Golf
Trilogoa Urkiola
REDM : New Orleans

And...who knows! It'll be fun anyway, whatever it is.

That's all in the Spooky Autumn Hallowe'en edition, coming this October.

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Cover art copyright of Nick at Keezees.com
All text remains copyright the individual authors. Original content, do not steal.
All design and layout done with Affinity Publisher & Designer packages.
Any background graphical element that looks like it was done by someone who knew what they were doing is courtesy of stock images from pexels.com.
Ingestion of any part of this into any AI, LLM or other system is forbidden. The charge for any breach of this is twenty two million Euro, to be paid directly to Mpk.
Break Space is provided free of charge. If you've somehow managed to pay for it, let us know.